

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

25¢

4220

SEPTEMBER

2 THRILLING
NOVELS

ALL NEW
STORIES

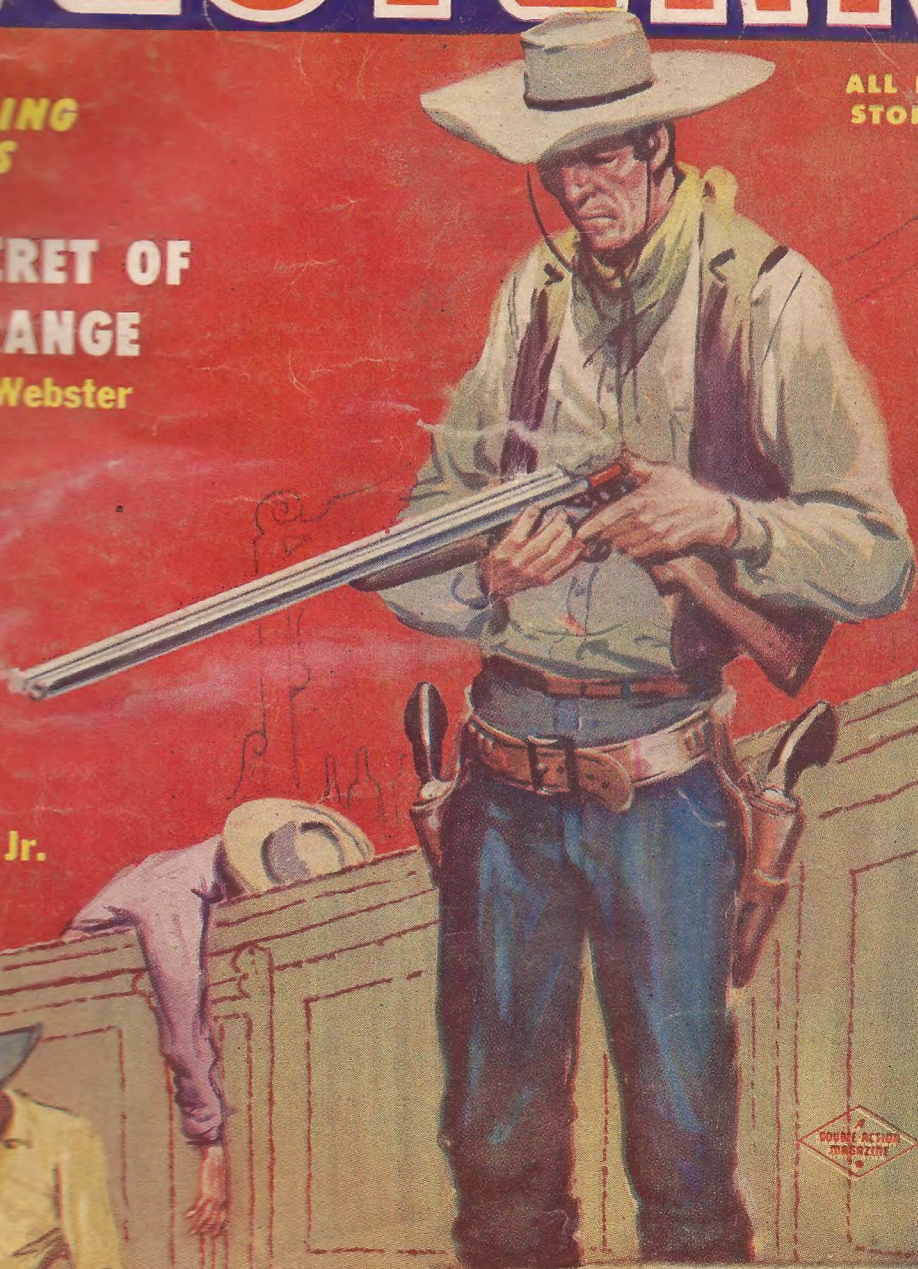
THE SECRET OF FOX RANGE

by Elton Webster

HELL'S CARGO

by Charles

Beckman, Jr.



DOUBLE ACTION
MAGAZINE

I saw my job failure in my family's eyes



... but how they smiled when I.C.S. pulled me through

Take it from me. That's the hard way to discover a mistake.

I thought I was in solid down at the plant with my years of experience. They'd never lay me off.

But they did. And I was in solid—as long as business was good. But when things started getting tight...

"In times like these," the boss told me, "everybody has to pull his own weight and a little more. Experience is more than just adding up years. You have to learn something, too."

I was sore, sure. But when I calmed down I realized he was right. I decided then to start learning. I signed up for an I.C.S. Course, studied at home in my spare time.

Then I went back to the plant. The boss was so impressed with my I.C.S. diploma, he gave me another try... and soon after I even got a raise!

TRAINED men are in demand

It's a fact. Right now there are plenty of job opportunities for trained men. How do you get training and hold down a job at the same time? Simple. Study with I.C.S. at home, in your spare time, at a cost of only pennies a day.

I.C.S. is the oldest and largest correspondence school, 256 courses. Business, industrial, engineering, academic, high school. One for you. Direct, job-related. Bedrock facts and theory plus practical application. Complete lesson and answer service. Diploma to graduates.

3 FREE BOOKS

1. "How to Succeed," a gold mine of job tips that will open your eyes to your own mistakes.
2. An outline of job opportunities in the field of your choice.
3. A sample I.C.S. lesson text. Send for them today.



For Real Job Security—Get an I. C. S. Diploma! I. C. S., Scranton 9, Penna. Member, National Home Study Council

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

65TH YEAR

BOX 22628G, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

(Partial list of 256 courses)

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW TO SUCCEED" and the opportunity booklet about the field BEFORE which I have marked X (plus sample lesson):

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| ARCHITECTURE and BUILDING CONSTRUCTION
<input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning—Refrig.
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture
<input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Interiors
<input type="checkbox"/> Building Contractor
<input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimator
<input type="checkbox"/> Building Maintenance
<input type="checkbox"/> Carpentry and Mill Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Heating
<input type="checkbox"/> Painting Contractor
<input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading Arch. Blueprints
ART
<input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Art
<input type="checkbox"/> Fashion Illustrating
<input type="checkbox"/> Magazine Illustrating
<input type="checkbox"/> Show Card and Sign Lettering
<input type="checkbox"/> Sketching and Painting
AUTOMOTIVE
<input type="checkbox"/> Auto Body Rebuilding
<input type="checkbox"/> Auto Elec. Technician
<input type="checkbox"/> Auto-Engine Tune Up
<input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Mechanic | AVIATION
<input type="checkbox"/> Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
<input type="checkbox"/> Aircraft & Engine Mechanic
BUSINESS
<input type="checkbox"/> Advertising
<input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping and Accounting
<input type="checkbox"/> Business Administration
<input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/> Public Accounting
<input type="checkbox"/> Creative Salesmanship
<input type="checkbox"/> Federal Tax
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter-writing Improvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Office Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Secretary
<input type="checkbox"/> Retail Business Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Sales Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Stenographic-Secretarial
<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management
CHEMISTRY
<input type="checkbox"/> Analytical Chemistry
<input type="checkbox"/> Chemical Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Chem. Lab. Technician
<input type="checkbox"/> General Chemistry
<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Gas Prod. & Trans.
<input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Plastics
<input type="checkbox"/> Pulp and Paper Making | CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
<input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Construction Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading Struct. Blueprints
<input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping
DRAFTING
<input type="checkbox"/> Aircraft Drafting
<input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Drafting
<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting
<input type="checkbox"/> Mine Surveying and Mapping
<input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing Drawing and Estimating
<input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting
ELECTRICAL
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Maintenance
<input type="checkbox"/> Electrician <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting
<input type="checkbox"/> Lineman
HIGH SCHOOL
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Good English
<input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects
<input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics | LEADERSHIP
<input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship
<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Supervision
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership and Organization
<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel-Labor Relations
MECHANICAL AND SHOP
<input type="checkbox"/> Gas—Electric Welding
<input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment <input type="checkbox"/> Metallurgy
<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Instrumentation
<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Supervision
<input type="checkbox"/> Internal Combustion Engines
<input type="checkbox"/> Machine Design-Drafting
<input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Inspection
<input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice
<input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Quality Control
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints
<input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration
<input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Worker
<input type="checkbox"/> Tool Design <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking
RADIO, TELEVISION
<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Electronics
<input type="checkbox"/> Practical Radio TV Eng'g
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio and TV Servicing
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Television Technician
RAILROAD
<input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake Equipment
<input type="checkbox"/> Car Inspector
<input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engineer & Fireman
<input type="checkbox"/> Station Foreman
STEAM AND DIESEL POWER
<input type="checkbox"/> Combustion Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Diesel—Elec. <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Eng's
<input type="checkbox"/> Electric Light and Power
<input type="checkbox"/> Stationary Fire <input type="checkbox"/> Throwing
<input type="checkbox"/> Stationary Steam Engineering
TEXTILE
<input type="checkbox"/> Carding and Spinning
<input type="checkbox"/> Cotton, Rayon, Woolen Mfg.
<input type="checkbox"/> Finishing and Dyeing
<input type="checkbox"/> Loom Fix'g <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Des'g
<input type="checkbox"/> Textile Eng'g <input type="checkbox"/> Throwing
<input type="checkbox"/> Warping and Weaving
MISCELLANEOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Refrigeration
<input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Ocean Navigation
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Engineering
<input type="checkbox"/> Short-Story Writing
<input type="checkbox"/> Telephony |
|--|---|---|--|---|

Name _____ Age _____ Home Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to P.M. _____

Occupation _____

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada. . . . Special tuition rates to members of the U. S. Armed Forces.

★ — **ACTION-PACKED** — ★ **WESTERN**

VOL. 3

SEPTEMBER, 1956

NO. 1

Two Suspenseful Novels

HELL'S CARGO

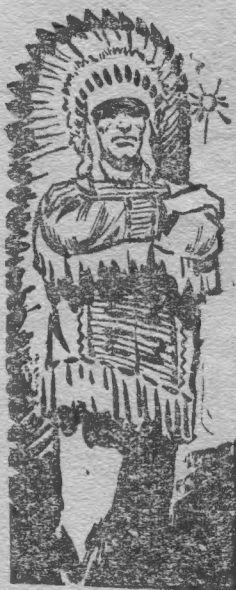
by Charles Beckman, Jr. 6

When Steve Kent, ace river pilot, came back from the war, it was to find his boat and his girl stolen from him. And the man responsible for both was the man who had taught Steve everything he knew about the River — Pilot Cass Rolf!

THE SECRET OF FOX RANGE

by Elton Webster 34

The activities of Raymond Fox would have been comprehensible enough, if the man were a rangehog. But Fox showed no interest at all in his herds — all he wanted to do was to keep strangers off his property!



Short Stories and Features

THE ROPING OF DRYGULCH McBAIN (verse) Edward Garner 33

THE CRIMSON COUP STICK A. A. Baker 72
The hostile Arapaho had good reason to be afraid of Conrad Bard...

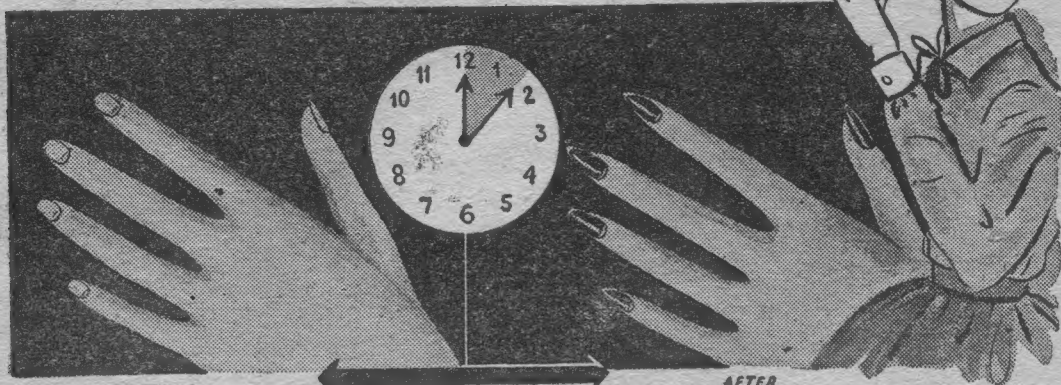
CONDEMNED HERO H. A. Huff 79
After a man's dead and gone, it doesn't hurt to say good things about him.

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN, September, 1956, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy 25¢; yearly subscription \$1.50. Entire contents copyright 1956 by Columbia Publications, Inc. Printed in U.S.A.



SCIENTIFIC *NEW* NATURAL NAIL FORMULA BUILDS OUT SHORT NAILS! Not a Polish. Not a "falsie", but a treatment to LENGTHEN NAILS! Repairs torn nails... Smooths jagged edges!



Have Lovelier Nails Than You Ever Dreamed Possible

Upset because your nails just won't grow? Embarrassed to show your hands in public because of short, broken off nails? You need no longer suffer! Now you can be proud to show your lovelier hands on dates, parties, dances and elsewhere. Amazing new NAIL-GRO gives you the long, beautiful tapering nails you've always wanted and needed to give you confidence and assurance in your appearance.

New Glamour And Beauty With First Application

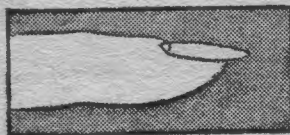
NAIL-GRO is a liquid plastic material applied directly to fingernails just like nail polish. Discovered by science, it sets to a clear, hard surface—looks and feels like your regular nail—actually grows with your nail. It can be cut, filed, polished—yet it's so strong, it can't break or tear—even when you're cleaning house, washing dishes, doing laundry, playing the piano, or typing. In just minutes, you have longer, lovelier nails—just the kind of hands men love to hold, caress—and place rings on.



1—Broken or short nails leave your hands looking ugly and uncared for. But there's no need for suffering this way any longer.



2—Simply place Nail form under your nail and apply powder with a wet brush. It's just like applying nail polish and doesn't require any more time.



3—When nail hardens, remove nail form and Presto! a longer lovelier nail is yours. Nail is now ready for filing and polishing. Looks and feels completely real.

New Discovery Aids Nail Biters

New York, N. Y.
Smoother Co. has discovered a new scientific formula that is not only treatment to lengthen and repair torn nails, but also a method of preventing future embarrassment by helping to put an end to the nail biting habit.
Nails treated with Nail-Gro are so sturdy and tough that teeth simply are not hard enough to bite them. It sure beats putting bandages on fingers, pepper on nails, or other outdated witchcraft. It would appear that the mutilating habit of nail biting will soon be extinct.

A FULL YEAR'S SUPPLY only **2.98**

Helps Put An End To The Nail Biting Habit

These nails are so sturdy, nail biters won't chew or mangle them. They'll help put an end to a nail biting habit that is destroying your loveliness and possibly ruining your chances for social success.

Manicure Lasts Days Longer

Colored nail polishes stay on Nail-Gro twice as long as they do on ordinary nails—and nail polish remover takes polish off faster and easier. So don't delay! Order now! See the pride and admiration in his eyes when he holds your hand. Only 2.98 for a full years supply. Enough for 50 Nails.

10 Day Free Trial

There's no need to continue with short, broken, unpleasant looking nails. See for yourself how Nail-Gro can give you a longer, tapering nail that adds loveliness you never dreamed possible. You Risk Nothing! Try it 10 Days free. If you are not 100% delighted, simply return the unused portion for full refund. Rush coupon now in time for that special event you want to look your best for. Only \$2.98.

Money Back Guarantee

Smoother Co.

Dept. 336-AA

Lynbrook, N. Y.

Please rush me my Nail-Gro at once for only \$2.98. I understand that if I am not 100% delighted with the results from my purchase after 10 Day Free Trial, I may return for prompt refund of full purchase price.

☐ I enclose payment. Smoother Co. will pay postage.
☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman on delivery plus a few cents postage.

Name _____

Address _____

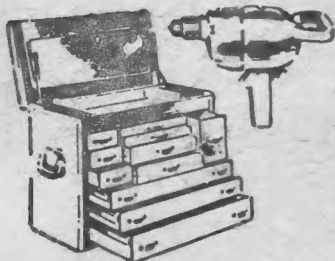
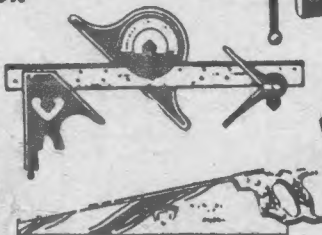
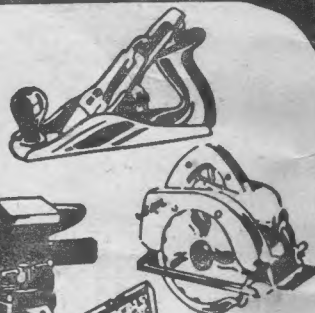
**Just
off the
Press!**

TOOL CATALOG



MAMMOTH 1956 Wholesale Tool CATALOG

The opportunity now awaits you to own and operate your own business on a part time or full time basis in the lucrative field of **HARDWARE, HAND TOOLS, FANS, POWER TOOLS, MOTORS, PAINTS, etc., or BUY TOOLS FOR YOUR INDUSTRIAL OR INSTITUTIONAL USES.**



You can buy Nationally
Advertised tools, etc., at a
Discount up to

50%

No investment required, buy as you need it. A million dollar inventory at your finger tips.

Every one needs tools. Meet the demands of the growing "Do-it Yourself" markets. Sell direct from the jumbo buying guide—your cost is known only to you.

If you are half as smart as we know you are, you **WILL**
ACT AT ONCE!

**Just
Fill Out
Coupon**

\$1.00 refund
on first purchase
or refund if you
are not 100% satisfied.

ENCLOSE \$1.00 FOR DEALERS CARD & 1956 MAMMOTH TOOL CATALOG

SILVO HARDWARE COMPANY 35 Wilbur St. Lynbrook, N. Y.
Dept. SH-7

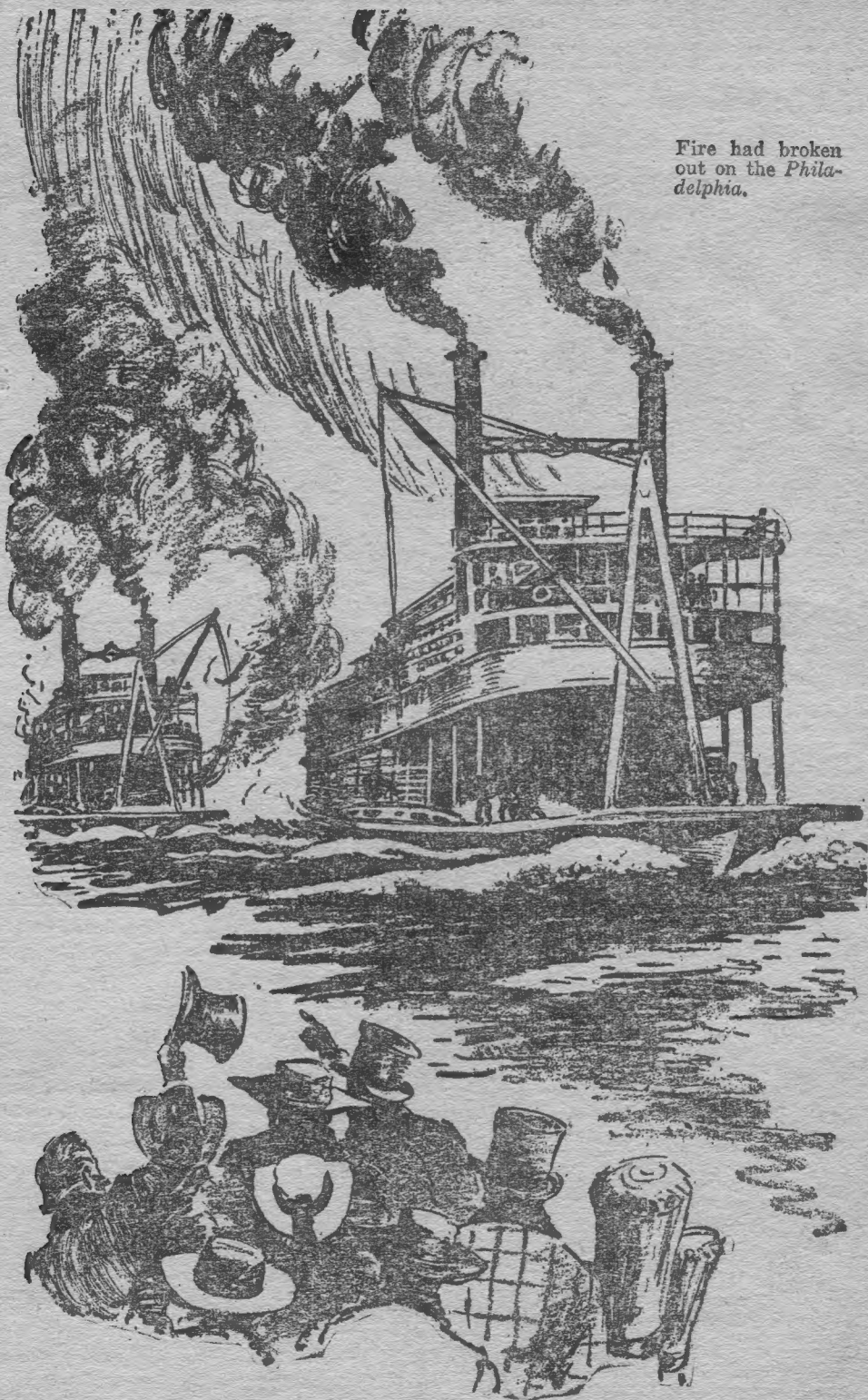
I am enclosing \$1.00. Rush me your dealer's card and big Catalog Today. If I am not completely satisfied with your plan, I understand that I can return the Dealer's Card and Catalog for refund, and if I decide to order, my \$1.00 will be deductible from my first order.

Name

Address

City Zone State

Fire had broken
out on the *Phila-*
delphia.



Cass Rolf had taught Steve Kent all he knew about the River, made Steve a pilot second only to Rolf himself, who was rated as the best. But when Kent came back from the War, it was to find that his mentor had stolen his boat, and his girl...

HELL'S CARGO

Novel of Rivermen's Rivalry
by CHARLES BECKMAN, JR.

ALEC DUPREE was bored with life. For thirty years, he with his partner, Frank Peychaud, had operated a small apothecary shop on Iberville Street in New Orleans. Through their dusty shop window they had seen the parade of great adventures pass them by.

They rolled pink and white pills while the Louisiana Greys marched off to Texas to fight Santa Ana. They ground powders while dashing young Creoles fought duels over beautiful girls on the shores of the Mississippi. They mixed bitters for the widow Pretre's dyspepsia while men in buckskin rode to the west in the gold fever of '49. Even the Civil War had come and gone with little alteration in the routine of the two old bachelors' lives.

Today made thirty years of it. Alec sighed and took down the ingredients for a fresh batch of bitters for the widow Pretre's acrimonious stomach.

At that precise moment, Frank Peychaud rushed into the shop amidst a clamorous jangling of the bell over the door and made an announcement that altered the course of their lives. "There's a steamboat race!"

Alec looked at him over the top of his gold rimmed spectacles. "The *Texas Star* and the *Philadelphia*," Peychaud panted. He sat down, red faced, and mopped his brow with a handkerchief. "They'll be around the bend in another ten minutes."

Alec put his vial down. "The *Philadelphia*... I heard Steve Kent was back on the river, piloting her."

"Yes, and Cass Rolf is at the wheel of the *Texas Star*. They raced all the way down from St. Louis."

"No!" Alec gasped.

The two old druggists looked at each other. Not once in thirty years had the front door of the apothecary shop been locked at this time of day. But to see the finish of a race between Cass Rolf and Steve Kent, the two men who bore the greatest hatred on the river...

"To hell with Madame Pretre's dyspepsia!" Alex exploded. He snatched up his hat and coat and scurried around from behind the counter. The two oldsters locked the front door with trembling fingers, shot one guilty look up and down the quiet street and then bolted for the docks on their rickety legs.

It was something to see, those two steamboats coming around the last bend, neck-and-neck, with black smoke from resin and pitch pine boiling out of their tall chimneys. They were both trim craft with long, fast lines; the *Texas Star* was in the 400 ton class, the *Philadelphia* was somewhat lighter.

Soon they were close enough for the watchers thronging the shore to make out clearly the gleaming gingerbread decorating the pilot houses, the white railings around the boiler-decks, the hurricane-decks and the texas-decks, the colorful paintings on the paddle-wheel housings and the gilded spreader bars between the chimneys. Their furnace doors were open, exposing roaring fires which the stokers were feeding with cordwood.

Along the docks, stevedores, store clerks, gamblers, idlers, children and dogs were setting up a clamor as the race neared its end. The *Philadelphia* had pulled ahead, in a sudden burst of speed, and gamblers were giving her the short end of the odds as they passed through the crowd, picking up last minute bets. Children were running between the onlookers, dogs were barking and men were cheering.

SUDDENLY, a silence fell over the group. Alec clutched his partner's sleeve. "What's the matter with that Steve Kent?" he cried. "He had the race won! Look at him, the fool—he's putting about!"

Peychaud stood on tip-toes squinting against the glare of the sun on the water. He shook his head. "They're in some kind of trouble on the *Philadelphia*. See—all the crew is running to the back part of the hurricane deck."

"It's a fire," somebody near them, with younger eyes, cried. "Look, the *Philadelphia* is on fire!"

Sure enough, now even the pharmacist's time-dimmed vision could see the flames and smoke shooting out from a cabin on the *Philadelphia*. The pilot had swung her around in mid-

stream and edged toward the nearest bank, not wanting to endanger the lives of his crew and passengers. If the fire got out of hand, they'd all have to get ashore in a hurry before the boat sank and the boilers exploded.

Meanwhile, the *Texas Star* pushed far ahead and swung into her landing, easily the winner. More than fifteen minutes later, the *Philadelphia* limped in, out of serious danger now, but still fighting to keep the fire away from the cotton bales and cordwood stacked on the bottom deck.

Alec and Frank turned away and walked slowly back to town. Alec shook his head sadly. "Poor Steve; he had that race won. Seems like all that boy's had lately is bad luck."

Frank didn't hear him. He was engrossed in thought, trudging with his hands clasped behind him, gazing down at the ground. Suddenly, he paused in front of a bar and suggested they have a drink. The two old fellows went into the dim, cool place. They sat at a table and had the waiter bring them each an absinthe. When the drinks came, Frank leaned over the table, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "Alec," he said, "I am tired of the drug business. Do you know what I would like to do?"

Alec stared at him, mouth slightly agape. "No...what?"

Frank looked embarrassed. He turned the short glass with the milky drink between his fingers. "I'd like to buy a steamboat," he blurted.

He kept staring down at his glass, blushing, and Alec stared at him. A clock on a wall ticked somberly, reminding them of the inexorable passage of time. Alec thrust his hand across the table. "You know," he exclaimed, now equally excited, "that's the smartest thing you've said in thirty years, Frank Peychaud!"

DOWN AT the docks, the six foot-two pilot of the *Philadelphia*, Steve Kent, swung his boat safely into its berth, turned the pilot house over to the Captain and went down to his cab-

in after his Colt revolver. When he banged out of the cabin, the gun was strapped around his waist and a cigar was clamped between his firm white teeth.

Mike O'Shean, his engineer met him on the hurricane deck. "'Twas that black son of the devil, the first mate, all right," O'Shean swore. "He set the fire. One of my stokers saw him cartin' an armful of waste oil rags out of the engine room a little while before it happened. Now he's nowhere to be found."

"He hit for shore the minute we touched the dock, you can be sure of that," Steve said through his teeth. "And right now he's over at the *Texas Star*, getting paid off by Rolfe."

"So that's the way of it," O'Shean muttered under his breath. His homely lantern jaw set like a block of granite. There was a capstan's bar in his knotty right fist. "Thin you'll be after payin' that gentleman a visit, Steve, and I'd be obliged if I might accompany you!"

Steve shrugged. "You can come along if you want to, Mike."

The two trotted down to the boiler deck and out the gangplank to the dock. At the end of the gangplank, they were met by a little man dressed in a brown suit with a dirty white waistcoat and a bowler hat. The man was waving his arms and cursing. His face was a dull beet red and his mutton chop whiskers bristled. When he spied Steve, he rushed up to the pilot and centered his wrath on the big man, shaking his fist up at Steve like a furious bantam rooster.

"It's men like you that are a menace to honest people on the river! Who gave you the authority to race my boat, endangering the cargo and the passengers?"

Steve recognized the little man as the owner of the *Philadelphia*. "Mister," he said, "anybody who sets foot on that tub when she's dead still at anchor and the boilers are cold, are takin' their lives in their hands, she's so rickety."

The boat owner's angry words rose to a new pitch, ending in a splutter. He panted for breath, finally gasped hoarsely, "Well, you're fired. You hear? You'll never pilot another boat for my company. And you're fired too, you—you," he pointed at O'Shean "—you Irishman!"

Steve laughed shortly. "I only took the job as pilot on that beetle to get passage down here from St. Louis. I wouldn't soil my hands on your greasy wheel again, Mister. Now, will you be so kind as to step out of my way?"

Steve pushed the red faced man aside and strode across the dock. Behind him, O'Shean picked the boat owner up by the front of his waistcoat, held him, feet kicking and arms waving off the dock, set him out of the way, and followed his pilot over to the *Texas Star*.

Steve covered the distance to the other boat, in long strides. As he walked, he looked around the familiar scenes on the levee, the negro stevedores chanting as they rolled the cotton bales off the decks of steamboats, wagons filled with merchandise, passengers crowding on and off the boats. It had been four years since he'd been in New Orleans and it was all changed now. As with other Southern cities, the war had disrupted trade, broken the port's economics. There were only a handful of boats here now, compared to the dozens that used to crowd the docks two and three deep.

Steve had come back to this city with the bitterness of a man who had lost a war, a steamboat and the woman he loved.

Emily's face materialized before him, haunting him with the memory of her deep black eyes, the curl of her raven hair against the creamy smooth skin of her shoulder, the sound of her laughter as she tossed her head.

HE SHOULD never have come back to this city. As so many of the ragged, disillusioned Confederate sol-

diers had done, he should have crossed the Mississippi and headed west, out into the new land where a man could build another life on the crumpled foundations of a lost cause. His coming back to this place was returning to the past and for him the past no longer remained. He no longer owned the *Texas Star* or Emily Latour. Cass Rolf had stolen his boat and his woman. If Steve stayed here, one of them would have to die; and there had been enough killing these past four years.

But Steve knew that the hate inside him would never stop eating at his vitals until he had the satisfaction of putting a bullet into Rolf.

After Gettysburg, Steve had hitched train rides across a devastated, war-sick land to St. Louis. With him had been Mike O'Shean, his engineer and friend who had followed him through four years of hell. In St. Louis, they both got work on the *Philadelphia*, Steve as pilot, O'Shean in charge of the engine room. They heard that Rolf had just left St. Louis bound for New Orleans. So they headed down the river with one purpose—to find Cass Rolf.

A few hours out of St. Louis they had caught up with the *Texas Star*, Steve's old boat that Rolf had stolen. The two men looked across the river and recognized each other, Rolf, the great riverboat pilot who had taught Steve his trade, and then knifed him in the back when he was away at war—and Kent, the younger man, war-sick and eaten by a hatred worse than cancer.

Cass Rolf had laughed at him across the Big Muddy, given a blast on his whistle and shown him the *Texas Star's* heels. Steve called down to the engine room on his tube for more speed. Within an hour, word had flashed up and down the river from St. Louis to New Orleans, that a race was on between the two boats.

All the odds had been against Steve Kent. The Big Muddy changed constantly, her sand bars shifted over

night and new wrecks made death traps below her treacherous surface. Steve had picked up information from other pilots in St. Louis, but still he had been away for four years, and Rolf had been on the river hauling supplies for the yankees. Steve had to feel his way, while the older man traveled a course he knew like the back of his hand.

In spite of this, Steve had kept up with the other boat; and when they got near the lower port in the wider, safer river, Mike O'Shean put a flat iron on the safety valve, piled in resinous pine wood and gave the rickety *Philadelphia* a burst of speed that would have won her the race if it had not been for the fire that broke out amidships.

Up in the pilot house, Steve had grimly stood at the wheel. He had cared little about racing with Cass Rolf, but, he knew Rolf's pride as the fastest pilot on the Mississippi, the man who had never been beaten in a race. Steve would have enjoyed rubbing the man's pride in the dirt before he killed him.

Then, the fire lost the race for the *Philadelphia*.

IT WASN'T hard to figure out what had happened. Their first mate, an ignorant, pig-faced brute who went by the name of Peel Brogan had worked under Rolf many times. He knew bets were flying thick and fast and that Cass had no doubt wagered considerable money with gamblers over on the other boat. He knew, too Cass Rolf's tremendous pride in his unbeaten record. His small brain had sluggishly figured out that Rolf might pay a generous bonus to a man who would help him win the race. Whereas, if the *Philadelphia* won the race, Peel Brogan stood to earn only his wages as first mate. So, Brogan had taken it upon himself to start the fire. Then, Steve figured, as soon as the *Philadelphia* docked, Brogan had scurried off her and headed for the *Texas Star* where he was probably this moment bragging to Rolf that he had started the fire.

Now the two men strode up the *Texas Star's* gangplank, Steve with his hand brushing the Colt sixgun strapped on his hip, and O'Shean, brandishing his capstan's bar.

Steve looked over the clean, white lines of the *Texas Star*. She was an elegant, beautiful lady, with thick red carpeting in her cabins, a saloon with a mahogany bar and great cut-glass chandeliers and a luxurious pilot house. She was one of the prettiest boats on the river and it had taken Steve years of hard work to pay for her. He touched her railing and a lump came in his throat. Then his jaws knotted with hatred for the man who had taken her away from him.

"Come on, Mike," Steve swore. He put one foot on her lower deck. The moment he did, a bullet buzzed angrily past his ear, as a rifle cracked somewhere.

Steve stepped back on the gangplank, looked up to the texas deck where the first mate stood with a rifle in his hands. "People come aboard this boat only by invitation, Mister," the first mate of the boat called down to him. "You ain't been invited."

Steve swore at him. "I'm inviting myself." He put his foot back on the deck and another bullet hummed past him, this one so close it ruffled his hair.

Mike O'Shean touched his sleeve. "Easy, boy; he's got the drop on us. There's probably others staked out with guns trained on us. They'd cut us to ribbons before we got two feet."

Steve nodded and moved reluctantly back to the gangplank. "You can tell your yellow-livered boss, Cass Rolf, that I came to call," Steve said to the man on the texas deck. "When he works up enough guts to meet me without his private army, I'll be in town!"

The first mate answered his words with a flat, hard laugh.

As Steve was leaving, he saw his own traitorous first mate, Peel Brogan, peering through a window in the pilot

house. "Brogan," Kent yelled up at him, "there's no place on this river that can hide you well enough so's I won't find you and beat the hide off you!"

Brogan swaggered out of the pilot house and sneered down at the two on the gangplank. "If you think you're man enough to do that, mister, you can meet me at the *Seaman's Bar* tonight."

Steve nodded grimly. "I'll be there."

"You can bring that shanty Irish rivertramp that calls himself an engineer along, too," Brogan added.

O'Shean blistered the deck with a string of dock-wolloper swear words and heaved the capstan's bar at Brogan. The mate ducked and missed getting his brains splattered on the pilot house by scant inches. His face dark with anger, Brogan shook a huge fist down at the engineer. "I'll take care of you men at the *Seaman's Bar* tonight!"

O'Shean and Kent walked away from the decks, down to the quaint city of wrought iron decorated balconies and tree shaded patios. They walked through narrow streets, between buildings that reflected French and Spanish architecture of the past century.

"That Rolf," O'Shean grumbled. "I knew he was a rat, but I didn't think he was so yellow he'd be after hirin' hisself a private army to hide behind. Surely he knows the day'll have to come when he's got to be facin' you, Steve."

"Whatever Cass Rolf is, he ain't yellow," Steve Kent said. "He had probably left the *Texas Star* before we got to her and put a guard on deck to keep us off the boat. He's around town somewhere."

O'Shean's steps slowed as they passed a saloon. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue as he shot a longing glance at the cool interior out of which issued a clink of glasses.

One side of Steve's mouth lifted in a smile. "O'Shean, go in there and take care of your thirst. I'll meet you at the *Seaman's Bar* tonight."

O'Shean nodded, smacking his lips.

"You be careful, Steve. Sure an' if Rolf is in town, the rat'd be likely to put a bullet in your back out of the darkness of an alley."

Steve Kent walked on alone, memories tugging at him from every familiar street corner. He passed the old Opera House and remembered that first night he had seen Emily Latour here, coming out on the walk, her cheeks flushed, laughing with the young Creoles around her. Steve had just finished his pilot training under Rolf, and had gotten his license. He'd walked down the street with a little swagger, because there was no man more respected or admired in the West, than a riverboat pilot.

Emily had looked up with her dark eyes and their gaze met and held. He had followed her carriage home to see where she lived and the next day he had called on her.

He remembered that first night he kissed her in the moon drenched patio. The air was heavy with the perfume of magnolia blossoms. She had been warm and alive in his arms and the moonlight had been like silver poured across the valley and curves of her bosom. When their lips met, her full red mouth was like the taste of exotic fruit. She got in his blood with a kind of fever that was stronger than his need for the river.

That night, he remembered her low, throaty laugh, soft against his cheek. "You're in love with me, Steve Kent and what's worse, I'm in love with you. But be careful; I'm a selfish woman. I think it only fair to warn you that I'm not like other women..."

He had heard rumors about her. There was talk that more than one man had died in a duel fought over her capricious love. But it was spring and the perfume of the magnolias was sweet and her lips were like hot syrup so he had chosen to ignore her thinly veiled warning.

THAT WAS the year before the start of the war. That year he made a down payment on his boat, the *Texas Star*. He took her far up the Missouri, to Fort Benton on long, dangerous hauls to meet the payments on her bank note. Then, in the early months of the war, he had run Union blockades with her and finished paying for her with contraband cargo. When New Orleans and Vicksburg fell and the river was in the hands of the Union, he left the boat in Emily Latour's name and joined the Southern forces with Mike O'Shean.

Now he was back and the years that had passed since he last saw Emily seemed like a dream.

He walked down the narrow streets, along the banquettes, making inquiries as he went, until he found the house where Emily was now living with her husband, Cass Rolf. Then he stood before it, gazing up at the closed, green shutters. His hand touched the hard, bone grip of his sixgun and the corners of his mouth drew down. He threw his cigar in a sewer ditch and walked up on the porch.

He rapped at the door and waited. Presently there was the sound of footsteps in the hall. Then the door opened and Emily looked up at him.

For a long moment she did not speak. Then, her eyes widened and grew darker, like twin pools stained with night. Her hand went to her long white throat and her cheeks paled. "What are you doing here?" she gasped. "Get out!"

With a chill smile on his lips, Kent shoved her aside and went into the house. He looked around him at the elegance of gleaming mahogany furniture, costly velvet drapes, deep carpets and glittering chandeliers. He thought of the gutted homes he had seen, the hungry people and the ragged soldiers without enough food or clothes for so long. The look in his eyes made the woman shudder.

"Why did you come back?" she

whispered, fascinated by the look in his eyes.

"I came back to get some things that belonged to me," Steve Kent said softly. "Do you remember, Emily?"

"Get out," she said raggedly. "Cass will be home soon. He'll kill you."

"That'll be nice," Kent said. "I think I'll wait. I think I'll wait here to see Rolf."

"Listen," she said, pushing shaky fingers into her hair, "you have to understand how it was, Steve. The war and everything—it was all mixed up, horrible. We thought you were dead; we really did. Word came back to us that you had been killed." Her face was shiny with perspiration.

Slowly, he began moving toward her. "Yes?" he murmured. "So you decided to marry Cass Rolf and give him my steamboat. It wasn't doing you any good, tied up at the docks. I signed the papers over to you, hoping the Yankees wouldn't confiscate her and she'd be waiting for me if I came back. So you had a steamboat, but it wasn't making money for you, tied up that way. You don't like having things that don't make money for you, do you, Emily? You decided if you married Rolf, the best pilot on the river, you and he could make a fortune by turning tail and working with the Yankees. It was a nice alliance, you and Cass. Both of you, loving that almighty gold better than God, honor or love..."

While he talked, Steve had moved toward her and she had backed until she was against a wall. Cornered, she suddenly lashed out at him like a spitting wildcat. She clawed and beat at him until he grabbed her wrists. Her black hair came undone and tumbled over her face. She struggled with him, tearing her dress. Then he threw her head back and kissed her.

He took his time about it. When he had finished, he threw her, panting and disheveled on a couch.

He stood over her, breathing hard. "I'm going out to find Cass, now," he

said. "When I do, I'm going to kill him. Then I'm going to take back the *Texas Star*, and you. You're my woman, Emily Latour, and don't forget it!"

He turned and walked out of the house. She screamed invectives after him until he was out of earshot.

Kent dabbed at her claw marks on his cheek with a handkerchief. He stood on a far corner, watching the house, waiting for Cass Rolf to put in an appearance. But, though he stood there patiently until the late afternoon shadows lengthened into dusk, Rolf did not show up. Finally, Kent decided that Cass, knowing Steve was in town, was staying away from the house on purpose. Rolf knew Steve would come there looking for him and he was trying to avoid a gun fight with his younger ex-pupil.

When it was finally dark, Kent walked down town to a hotel where he rented a room. He got cleaned up and then strolled to *Antoine's* on St. Louis street for supper. He had a leisurely meal, smoked a cigar. Then he went over to the *Seaman's Bar*.

As yet, neither Mike O'Shean nor Peel Brogan had showed up. Steve sat at a table and had an after dinner liquor. The place was filled with boatmen, pilots and men of the river. It catered to the more elite of the riverboat crews, the officers and owners. The air was thick with smoke. A tinny piano was playing loudly. At regular intervals a French girl in a scanty costume came out and stood beside the piano and sank risque songs in cajun French.

Steve had been there a half hour when he saw two old men come into the place and peer around. They were dressed in long black shiny broadcloth frock coats, sober colored trousers, and high standing collars and dark neckties, the customary dress of business men of the day. Both men were in their sixties. One was rolly polly, with a shiny bald pate and a pink countenance. The other was a wisp of a man who blinked near-sightedly over the

gold rims of his spectacles. They had neat white goatees, long sideburns and looked like physicians.

They looked the place over until they spied Steve, then came directly to his table.

THE ROLLY-POLLY one addressed Steve first. "You, Sir, are Mr. Steve Kent, is that not so?"

Steve admitted that was so.

The old fellow bobbed his head. "My name, Mr. Kent, is Frank Psychaud. This is my partner, Alec Dupree."

Steve shook hands with both the men.

"You don't remember us, Steve," Alec Dupree said, taking a seat beside his partner at Steve's table. "But we used to see you down on Iberville Street a good deal before the war, when you were a youngster just learning to be a riverboat pilot. We own a little apothecary shop there. I believe you came in once in a while to have a prescription filled."

Steve nodded and said that he recalled the place.

"To make a long story short, Mr. Kent," Frank Psychaud continued, "Alec and I have grown tired of the drug business."

"Yes," Dupree chimed in excitedly. "We want to buy a steamboat and we'd like to engage you to help us pick out a good boat, and then pilot her for us."

"What do you say, Mr. Kent?" Psychaud asked anxiously, leaning over the table. "We know you are one of the best pilots on this river and we understand that you are unemployed at the moment. We will make it very much worth your while. We might even," he added, "make you a part owner."

"Yes indeed," his spindly partner, Dupree broke in again. "Won't you consider it, Steve?"

Kent smiled at the old gentlemen's enthusiasm. "I regret to say that I have some unfinished business in New Or-

leans at the present, gentlemen. I'm not considering taking on any kind of employment until it is settled—"

"But," Frank Psychaud urged, "if it is settled in the near future..."

Just then Steve caught sight of a burly man elbow his way into the place through the swinging doors. Steve looked at the short cropped hair, the thick shoulders and long, ape-like arms of the first mate, Peel Brogan, who had set fire to the *Philadelphia*. Kent put down his liquor glass. "Gentlemen," he said, "part of that unfinished business has just walked through the door. I'm afraid you must excuse me for the rest of the night. If I change my mind about your proposition, I'll come by your drug store. Now I'd advise you to leave this place right away."

He turned and walked over to where Peel Brogan stood.

- 2 -



SHORTER than Steve Kent by a head, Brogan was a square-built, powerful man with huge shoulders and a pair of arms that could wrap around a five hundred pound cotton bale and lift it inches off the floor.

He ran his deck crews with thunderous curses and a smashing fist. Along the river, Peel Brogan was one of the most feared and hated first mates that a deck hand could work under. He had killed several husky stevedores with his bare hands and for that reason few boat owners wanted to hire him.

Steve knew he was going to have his hands full for the next few minutes. He was taller than Brogan, but the mate outweighed him by fifty pounds.

"Well," Brogan sneered, "I didn't think you'd have the courage to meet me here. What's on your mind, Mister?"

"You deliberately started a fire on the *Philadelphia* today," Steve said through his teeth, advancing slowly to where Brogan waited. "You did it to keep us from winning the race; hoping your old boss, Rolf, would give you a bonus."

Brogan chuckled deeply. "That's a pretty tough charge, Mister; you better be willin' to back it up with some action!"

Steve told him that he was.

Brogan swung his head at the door. "Then, suppose we go outside and settle this argument. No sense in bustin' up the man's furniture here." Brogan turned and lumbered out of the saloon.

Too infuriated to be cautious, Steve slapped the swinging doors open and followed Brogan out to the street. If he had been a little cooler, he would have been suspicious; a man like Brogan never fought on even terms when he could help it. But Steve was giving that little thought at the moment; all he wanted to do was get his hands on the treacherous mate.

Out in the street, Brogan swung around. Candles in the sidewalk lamps and pine torches held by some men in the street cast a ruddy, flickering glow over the scene. Out of the shadows, some sullen faced men moved toward them.

"Here he is, boys," Brogan swaggered, the bloated planes of his sun blistered face darkened by shadows. "Here's the smart pilot, Steve Kent, that can't take loosin' a race like a man. He's been tellin' it in every bar in town that the *Texas Star* cheated him outa the race—that every man aboard the *Texas Star* is yellow and unfair. I oughta know because I served under him all the way down from St. Louie and I know what he said."

The deck crewmen of the *Texas Star* moved toward Steve in a body, their faces flushed with liquor. A low rumbling came from them, the sound of a mob whipping itself to action. Steve

had done. All day, the bully, afraid to face Steve in a fair fight, had been taking the *Texas Star* crewmen around to bars, soaking them in whisky and filling them with lies about Steve until he had them in a lynching mood. Then he brought them down here to do his fighting for him.

Steve watched the mob converge on him. They were big men, all of them, men who stoked boilers with heavy cordwood and heaved cotton bales around the docks. Their muscles rippled in the flickering light. In their hands were clubs and knives. They'd make short work of him, in their present mood.

STEVE BRACED himself, and his hand moved down toward his revolver. He'd stop a few of them before they mobbed him; after that he'd be done for. Greater than the fear of death so close at hand, was a deep regret in him that he would have to die without settling his account with Cass Rolf and Emily.

Then Steve heard another sound.

It came from the other end of the street, behind him. It began as a murmur and swelled until it reached through the liquor-thickened wits of the *Texas Star* mob and they looked up at it.

Steve was afraid to take his eyes off the men before him, even for a second. But then he distinguished an Irish whisky tenor singing amidst the rising sound and a smile touched his lips. He flicked a glance behind him, then, and the smile widened into a grin.

Mike O'Shean was coming down the street, roaring drunk, with a shillelagh in his hand and the crew of the *Philadelphia* at his heels. His red hair was standing up all over his head in tufts and he was reeling with every other step and taking whistling swipes at the night air with his cudgel. All the while he was singing an old Irish tune that his clan had howled when they went into battle on the old sod.

Once, at Vicksburg, Steve had seen Mike wade into a whole Union artillery gun crew with that same shillelagh in his hands and the same song on his lips and send the lot of them scattering with cracked skulls.

Now, the two boat-crews met in the middle of the street with the impact of two steamboats running head on out in the river. The night was split wide open with the sound of men cursing, the smash of fist against bone and the howl of the injured. In the thick of the fray was Mike O'Shean, standing spraddle-legged, wielding his club with deadly accuracy.

Steve ran after Peel Brogan who was hightailing it away and hauled him back by the scruff of his neck. He drove a fist into Brogan's midsection and the blow bounced off as if it had struck the side of a cow. Mixed fear and rage contorting his face, Brogan hit back, a huge fist the size of a Virginia ham. It connected with Steve's cheek bone, driving him back, one side of his face numbed. Steve plowed in again and the two big men stood toe to toe, slugging it out.

There was a lot of punishing, brute force behind Peel Brogan's hairy fists. A coward at heart, he was, nevertheless, dangerous like a cornered rat. Steve's face was numb. Blood had run from a cut eyebrow into one eye, half blinding him. More than one of his ribs had been cracked by the mate's fear crazed strength.

Steve's fists, though were doing the most damage. They were hard and fast like greased lightning and they stung like rocks pelting Brogan's face and body. The mate's nose and mouth had dissolved into a bloody pulp. He was wheezing and gasping for the breath that had been knocked out of his midsection by Steve's twisting uppercuts. Twice, he went down on one knee, but came up again, flailing with his big fists. Finally, Steve had backed him up on the banquette in front of the saloon's front plate glass window.

Behind the window, there were rows of faces, the men in the saloon, watching the free-for-all out in the street. Steve caught Brogan with a hard left punch to his solar plexus. The mate doubled over the blow, purple-faced. Then Steve swung a tremendous round house blow that started at his ankle. It caught Brogan on the point of his jaw, lifted him off his feet and threw him, arms flailing, into the plate glass window. He went through it, in a shower of glass, landing inside the saloon across a domino table, splintering it. He lay there for a while in the wreckage of the table and then he rolled over and crawled away, whimpering like a frightened hound, all through with fighting for the night.

Steve stood on the walk, swaying and panting, blood running down the side of his face. He wiped it out of his eye with the back of his hand and then plowed into the main fight to help Mike O'Shean.

At that minute a detachment of cavalry came galloping down the street and put an end to the battle.

THE NEXT morning, Steve Kent awoke painfully to the drumming of little devils in his head. It took him a minute, blinking at the sun streaming through a barred window to remember that he was in jail. In the bunk above his, Mike O'Shean, his engineer was blissfully sawing wood. Steve kicked at the bunk and swore. "You're taking the top of my head off with that racket, you blasted Irishman!"

He lay there a minute longer, trying to go back to sleep, then gave it up and crawled painfully out of his bunk. His bruised body was stiff and every movement made his cracked ribs grate. Dried blood had caked on the side of his face. His mouth tasted like a steamboat's boiler with a month's accumulation of river mud in it. He groaned, staggered across the concrete floor to a washstand and emptied a pitcher of

cold water over his throbbing head.

In the upper bunk, Mike O'Shean sat up and looked around bleary-eyed. "The Saints preserve us," he gasped. "What're we in for?"

"As well as I recall," Steve muttered, "for disturbing the peace, inciting a riot, destroying property, drunken behavior and resisting arrest."

"Faith," Mike swore with pride, "did we do all that, now? And resist arrest, too?"

Steve told him that he broke his shilelagh over one of the soldier's head.

O'Shean asked wistfully if it had been a second Lieutenant.

Steve dried his face on a towel and combed his hair. Then he walked to a window, folded his arms on the sill and gazed down on a quiet New Orleans morning scene. Two little boys were struggling along a walk with a heavy bucket of water between them. A buggy clip-clopped by on the cobblestone streets. A woman came out of her house with a pail of slop, threw it in the sewer ditch in front of her house and returned to her porch.

O'Shean got out of the bunk and washed his face. "Do you have any idea what our fine'll be?"

"More money than we'll have," Steve muttered. He realized that he was pounding his fist slowly and steadily against one of the bars. He turned away from the window, rubbing his skinned knuckles. By the time they got out, Roth Kobe would have his boat loaded and be far up the river again.

"Wonder when they serve breakfast?" Mike grumbled. "There's nothing like a good fight to give a man an appetite."

Steve heard a key grate in the cell door. "Maybe that's it now," he said.

THE DOOR opened, and the jailer came in. He was the kind of man who kicked and cursed his run-of-the-mill prisoners, but, he showed a degree of respect for Steve because he was a

riverboat pilot. "Gentlemen," he said, "your fines have been paid. You can leave now, if you're ready."

Steve stared at the man in disbelief. Then he looked at Mike and Mike looked at him, their faces perplexed. "Who paid the fine?" Steve asked the jailor.

The man shrugged. "Reckon you'll find out when you collect your personal belongin's at the desk. I just got my orders to turn you out, that's all."

In the front office of the jail, their personal effects were returned and they were freed with a stern reprimand from the officer in charge. "Just keep out of any more trouble, that's all. We've got our hands full enough with these carpetbaggers and Confederate veterans fighting on every street corner, without you rivermen making things worse with your squabbles." He jabbed a pen toward a closed door. "Go in that ante-room before you leave. The person who paid your fine wants to talk with you in there."

They walked across the concrete floor.

"D'ye suppose now that black-hearted owner of the *Philadelphia* relented and come down to bail the best pilot and engineer his tub iver had, outa the calaboose?"

Steve said that he doubted it. He opened the door to the ante room, stepped across the threshold, then froze, his mouth slightly agape.

The woman seated at a chair raised her wide gray eyes. She nodded coolly. "Good morning, Captain Kent," she greeted in a well modulated, throaty voice.

She was a beautiful woman in her early twenties. An aristocratic family background showed in the fine lines of her face and the upward tilt of her chin.

She was dressed in a cocoa brown costume with a white blouse, a Figaro jacket and a Swiss belt trimmed with black braid and pendants. White petticoat flounces peeked out from the

hem of her hooped skirt. Her hat, a saucy affair with a small rolling brim and a drooping ostrich plume perched with a stylish forward rake on a mass of blonde curls.

Steve recovered his manners and bowed. "At your service, Ma'm."

"Please take a chair, Captain," the girl said in the same cool, poised voice. Then she introduced herself, "My name is Lucy Furman."

Steve in turn introduced Mike O'Shean who had followed him into the room. Then he apologized for their appearance. "They don't furnish barbers to their guests here," Steve smiled ruefully, touching his unshaven cheeks.

She waved that away with an impatient flick of her hand. "I've come to talk business, Captain." When Steve was seated, she went on crisply. "I am going to state my proposition as directly as I can. But, I must necessarily tell you something of my background first. My father was George Furman; does that name mean anything to you?"

STEVE RUBBED his chin reflectively. "Seems I've heard that name around this town. He was in the fur business as I recall."

"He came from an old Mississippi plantation family, Captain Kent. He was a speculator and a dreamer. In recent years he opened a fur company with a partner, Howard Martin, and it became his most successful venture. Father, though, had a blind spot about human nature. He trusted everybody, most of all his partner, Martin. I never could make him see that Howard Martin was a crook, out to grab more than his share of the company's profits at every turn."

She drew a deep breath. "But to get back to the facts that concern us now; last year father put a large sum of money, almost his entire fortune into a trapping expedition that he sent up the Missouri to the Northwest after

furs. Since Howard put no money into the expedition, they had agreed that father would get the largest percentage of profits out of this particular deal."

Her gaze fell to her hands now folded in her lap. "Father died this winter, before the expedition was to return with their furs." Then she glanced up at Steve again and her eyes were blazing with venom. "I never trusted Howard Martin, never as long as he was Dad's partner. Now I have found that my distrust of the man was justified. I have definite proof that he has hired a steamboat to go up the Missouri to meet that expedition and get his hands on the furs, first. If he does, I will never get the share of the profits that rightfully belonged to Dad. I'll be lucky if I get anything at all."

Steve asked her permission to light a cigar. He puffed on it thoughtfully. "If you'll pardon me, Ma'm, I'm still kinda vague as to what all this has to do with you coming down to spend good money on bailing out a couple of boatmen you never saw before in your life?"

"I'm coming to that now," she answered. "You see, I want to send a boat of my own up the Missouri to get to those furs before Howard reaches them. I have made many inquiries around the docks and at the Pilot's Association. The only pilot that they all agreed could navigate that far up the Missouri, beside the one Howard Martin has hired, was you, Captain. They said you had been up there the summer before the war. I understood that you were bringing the *Philadelphia* down from St. Louis this week. I have been waiting for you to arrive. Word reached me about the trouble you had last night and so I had to come here to find you."

Steve wondered why she called him "Captain." He had not been addressed in that manner since he lost his own boat. He started to interrupt, but she raised her hand. "Please, let me finish before you say anything." She leaned

forward. "I don't have enough money to buy a boat. But if you could help me interest a boat owner in this proposition and if you would pilot his boat up the Missouri, past Fort Benton to those furs, I could make both you and the boat owner rich. The furs waiting for us up there are worth a king's ransom."

Steve let the cigar smoke ribbon from his lips. "Well, Ma'm, there are possibilities that you could interest a boat owner in this trip, all right. Trade on the river is badly shot right now. A boat owner wouldn't be riskin' anything because even if we didn't get to those furs of yours in time, there is still the passenger trade from Fort Benton to haul back. If a boat left now, it would get there about in time to bring back the miners who don't want to spend a winter up there. So, in either event, the boat would profit from the trip, and you, of course, would pay the expenses going."

Her eyes shone triumphantly. "Then you'll do it, Captain?"

STEVE AROSE. "I'm sorry, Ma'm; I didn't say that. I'm afraid you'll have to find another pilot. I have business to settle in this town and I'm not going anywhere until I tend to it." He bowed. "I'm grateful for you payin' our fines, and if you'll give us a couple of days, Ma'm, we'll return the money it cost you." With that he turned and started to the door.

"Just a minute, Captain," the girl's voice spoke coolly behind him. "I know all about that unfinished 'business' of yours. I spent quite a bit of time and money checking into you before I decided you would be the man for this trip. You see, I know about the boat you lost, the *Texas Star*, about Emily Latour and Cass Rolf. If you'll pardon me, Captain, you were a damn fool for trusting any woman with an expensive thing like a steamboat!"

Steve whirled, his face flushing with anger. But the girl remained as poised

and calm as if she were presiding at a meeting of the women's Missionary Aid. She said, "You'll make the trip, all right, Captain. You will if you ever want to settle your little affair with Rolf. You see, the boat my father's partner, Howard Martin, hired to go after those furs is the *Texas Star*. Cass Rolf took her out of the harbor early this morning with his wife on board. By now he's well on his way to the upper waters of the Missouri..."

- 3 -



TEVE KENT and Mike O'Shean pushed open the door of the small, musty drug shop on Iberville street. They walked into the place and nodded at the two old white-whiskered gentlemen sitting glumly behind the counter.

"You boys still interested in buying a steamboat?" Steve asked.

Frank Peychaud and Alec Dupree stared at him, their mouths falling open. Then they looked at each other. Then they scurried around the counter and grabbed Steve's hand. After giving it a thorough wringing, they pumped Mike O'Shean's freckled paw. "Wait until I get my hat," Alec Dupree cried gleefully.

They went down to the docks and nosed around the boats for sale. By noon they had found one that satisfied Steve, both as to construction and price.

She was, first of all, a long boat with sharp lines—which meant she would be a fast boat, though her freight capacity would be smaller. She was a stern wheeler, too. Steve had the lower river boatman's prejudice against stern wheelers, but he knew these hind kickers drew less water than the side wheelers. Therefore, she'd be

a better boat to take into the shallow upper Missouri.

O'Shean came up from the engine room wiping his hands on a bundle of waste rags, nodding his approval on what he'd seen down there. "She has two good high pressure engines," he proclaimed, "and a triple boiler. She's got a stout heart, my lad."

Steve and his engineer walked aft on the Texas deck and gazed down at the stern paddles. Steve swore. "It'll feel unnatural not to have the wheels on the side. But she'll draw a third to two thirds less water than a side wheeler."

"Sure an' she will that," O'Shean agreed. "And she has one of them new fangled balanced rudders so she'll out maneuver the *Texas Star*. Rolf may outrun us on the big river, but he'll ground his boat on the Missouri before we will this one. You could open a keg of beer and float this hull on the suds, Stevie."

Kent agreed with that. "Well, let's go talk to those two old pill-rollers. I want them to know what they're letting themselves in for. Running a steamboat is a shade different from an apothecary shop."

ALEC DUPREE and his partner, Frank Peychaud were in the pilot house having more fun than two kids at a circus. Alec was standing behind the wheel and Frank was pulling the whistle cord.

Steve sat on a leather upholstered couch and lit a cigar. "Well, she's a sound boat," he told them; "and from an investment standpoint, you can get her for a bargain. Furthermore, I've already got a freight customer for you which might bring in a good profit from the first trip up the Missouri. But I want to be sure you understand that operating a steamboat is a financial gamble, and you could lose your life's savings overnight."

He then proceeded to give them a lecture on the hazards of riverboat

ownership. He pointed out the uncertainty of a free lance operator's profit when competing with the packet and line services. They might, he said, make a fortune in one haul—or they may operate at a steady loss for five years, until all their money was used up. Going up the Missouri was risky business; they could run aground, or hit a sawyer, on their first voyage and lose the boat.

"But if you want me to pilot your boat, we're going to make that Missouri run," he added. "I don't mind telling you I have a selfish reason for wanting to do it, though I'll do everything in my power to see that you make a profit from the trip. Now, gentlemen, the decision is yours."

The two oldtimers exchanged glances, then Peychaud acted as their spokesman. "We've already taken all that under consideration, Steve. You see, we're a couple of old codgers who haven't had much fun out of life. Our stay on this earth is nearing its end and we haven't done a blasted thing except roll pills. We've never even got married. All right, maybe we'll lose our shirts." He shrugged. "In a few more years it won't matter, anyway; at least we'll have been in on one adventure before we die."

"I expect," Alec Dupree added, gazing through the window, up the winding river with a dreamy look in his old eyes, "that we may live more on that trip to the Missouri than we did in the thirty years that we spent being bored in our shop on Iberville Street." Then he turned to Steve. "Do you think," he asked shyly, "that you might let me steer the boat one time?"

O'SHEAN went with the two old men to sign the papers on the boat. Steve contacted the Furman woman, told her to be ready to sail by midnight. Then he spent the rest of the afternoon signing on his crew. By sundown, the crew was aboard the boat and O'Shean was stoking the boil-

ers, getting up a head of steam. At exactly eleven-thirty, Steve mounted the stairs to the pilot house, gave an order through his speaking tube, and gripped the wheel as the rear paddles began churning.

When they were well out in the river, headed upstream, Lucy Furman came up to the pilot house.

"Rolf has a good sixteen hour start on you," she said.

Steve spun the wheel, put his foot against a lower spoke and lit a cigar while the boat changed its course and followed closer to the bank. "We'll catch him," he answered. "Rolf doesn't know he's being chased; he won't be trying to make any real race out of it until we're on his heels."

"Don't you be too sure he doesn't know we're following him. Remember, there's a small fortune at stake, Captain," the Furman girl said. "Howard Martin is the kind of man who thinks of all the angles. He probably has had agents watching me in New Orleans and the next time the *Texas Star* stops for fuel, there'll be a telegram waiting for it."

Steve watched the black bank with practiced eyes. "He may get to the Missouri before we do, but we have a better boat for shallow water. We'll get to those furs for you, Miss Furman."

She was standing near an open window. The breeze off the river played with the golden strands of her hair. Moonlight bathed the long white curve of her throat with platinum. "And then," she said softly, "you will catch up with Cass Rolf, and one of you will be killed..."

Steve did not answer. It irritated him that the woman knew so much about his private life.

They were silent for a while, listening to the steady throb of the engines below them, the splash of the paddle wheel behind and the croaking of frogs on the bank.

With practiced eyes, Steve followed

the course of the river. Faint signs, a shadowy clump of chinaberry trees, a slight curve in the bank, indiscernible to the layman's eyes, were clear landmarks to a riverboat pilot. They helped him plot his course to avoid dangerous sand bars, submerged stumps and wrecks always lurking under the muddy surface to wreck his boat.

Steve remembered when he had been a cub pilot, being initiated into the mysteries of the river by the great Rolf. He remembered his first trip up the river, just a boy beginning to shave, how he had marveled at the way Rolf could pilot his boat through dangerous waters in the blackest night. Up and down the river, there had been no greater pilot than Rolf. To young Steve Kent, he had been a kind of God. And when he'd consented to teach Steve the river, every boy from St. Louis to New Orleans had turned green with envy. Now Steve was on his way to kill the man he'd once admired and respected so much...

"YOU MUST have thought a great deal of him at one time," Lucy Furman suddenly said softly, as if reading his mind.

Steve jumped. "Who?"

She had been looking at the river. Now she turned her wide, gray eyes on him. "Why, Cass Rolf," she said. "He was your teacher, wasn't he? Or, so I've heard."

Steve said, "I think you make it your business to hear too much. Maybe you'd better go to your cabin before you catch cold in the night air."

She raised one eyebrow and her full, red lips quirked. She came up to him, laid her hand on his arm. The scented fragrance of her nearness touched his nostrils. "Am I being reprimanded? I'm sorry; perhaps I touched a sore spot." She turned and left the cabin.

As she lifted her full skirts to step through the door, Steve said, "By the

way, we are changing the name of this boat. I thought you would like to know. We have decided to name her the *Lucy Furman*."

She looked at him with surprise written in her face. "Why, thank you, Captain," she said huskily; "I consider that a very great compliment indeed."

Steve watched her go down to the hurricane deck. She did not retire to her cabin, however. Instead, she leaned over the railing and watched the river slip by. She seemed filled with an inner tension and turmoil that would not let her sleep.

For a while, Steve forgot about the woman. Going upstream, a pilot kept his boat close in to the shore to avoid the midstream current that would slow his boat down. Consequently, there was more danger of snagging a reef or sawyer. It took all of his concentration to navigate.

Presently, his relief pilot came up on the texas deck. As was the custom with many of the haughty pilots of the day, the man was dressed like a dandy and wore kid gloves. He was a good man, though, and he knew the river well. Entering the cabin, he stripped off his gloves, nodded at Steve and took over at the wheel. It wasn't necessary to give him their location; one glance at the obscure bank told him everything he needed to know.

Steve left the pilot house. He was tired. He'd been away from the river for a long time and because he was a little rusty he could not relax at the wheel. Before going to his cabin, he strolled around the texas deck to get some of the tension out of his body. Then he went down to the hurricane deck. He happened to glance to the fore part of the deck and was surprised to see the Furman girl still at the rail. On an impulse, he started in her direction to speak to her. Then

something he saw made him step back into the deep shadows of the cabins.

A DECK HAND was coming around the other side of the deck, moving cautiously up to Lucy Furman. The fact that a hand would be on that part of the boat at this time was surprising enough. But the stealthy way he was creeping up on the girl was a double warning.

Silently, Steve inched through the deep shadows, working his way toward the girl without giving the other man any warning. Then, in a flash, the deck hand sprang on the girl. He clamped one hand over her mouth, cutting off any screams. Moonlight flashed on a knife held in his other hand. For a moment, the two figures struggled silently on the hurricane. The Furman girl was putting up a game fight for her life, clawing and striking her assailant blindly.

Then Steve covered the distance to them in three long-legged strides. His big hand grabbed the man's hair, jerking his head back so hard his neck popped. The deck hand let out a yelp of pain, released the girl and swung on Steve, slashing with his knife. No longer gagged, Lucy screamed once, a sharp cry that pierced the still night.

Steve caught the man's knife hand in his left, twisting the wrist. Then he drove a hard right in the man's face. It was so hard that the would-be murderer crashed through the hurricane deck's posts and railing, sprawled out into the night and fell to the main deck below with a hoarse scream. He hit the deck, spread-eagle and didn't move.

Steve turned to the girl. She was breathing hard and her teeth were chattering with fright. A strand of her blonde hair had fallen across her face. In the struggle, one shoulder of her dress had been half torn off and

the rounded curve of her shoulder and bosom gleamed whitely in the moonlight. She held the torn part of her dress to cover herself. "It seems I owe you thanks for saving my life," she gasped.

"I had to sign this crew on in a hurry," Steve apologized; "I guess some of them were pretty rough characters. He must have thought he could steal some jewelry off you."

She shook her head. "I told you Howard Martin wanted those furs badly."

Steve frowned. Then he swore softly. "You think that was one of Martin's men? That he was paid to sign on as a deckhand just to get you out of the way?"

She said, "Howard wants those furs—and he's the kind of man who won't stop at murder to get them."

STEVE HOPED to question the girl's assailant, but the fall to the bottom deck had broken his back and he died without regaining consciousness.

The rest of the night, Steve slept uneasily between his next four hour turn at the wheel. If one of the men in his crew had been in the employ of Howard Martin, there could be others. There were a lot of things a man could do to wreck a steamboat. Before returning to the pilot house, Steve warned his engineer, O'Shean, to keep a watchful eye open, and he also put the owners of the boat, Peychaud and Dupree on the alert. He told Lucy Furman to either stay locked in her cabin or to stick in the vicinity of himself, O'Shean, or the old druggists if she came on deck.

To gain time, when they needed fuel, they hitched on flatboats waiting at some of the wood stations for boats that were in a hurry. Deck hands piled the cordwood on board and the barges were unhitched, all in

a smooth operation that cost only a fraction of the time it would have taken to dock the steamboat and load wood aboard while she was at a standstill.

After they got further up the river, into the Missouri, these refueling stations would become scarcer until, as they neared Fort Benton, they'd have to go ashore and cut their own cordwood.

Now, though, they were making excellent time. From men on the wood barges, Steve learned that they had cut Cass Rolf's sixteen hour lead to less than five. He expected to sight the *Texas Star* soon after they got into the Missouri.

Once, O'Shean came up on the texas deck to cool off from the heat of his boilers. He studied the river marks on the shore with a critical eye. "Would ye see the likes of that, now! She's fallin' like water in a barrel with th' bung hole open."

Steve grunted. "We're not only racin' Rolf to those furs," he said. "If we don't make it up there in record time, she'll be too low for us to get back, and this tub will be stranded on a sand bar."

They kept whittling doggedly at Rolf's lead until, after they were up the Missouri a few miles, they stopped for wood at a small town and learned they were only an hour or so behind the *Texas Star*.

"We'll catch sight of her sometime tonight," Steve promised Lucy Furman.

About ten that night, Lucy was in the pilot-house with Steve, both of them straining their eyes against the blackness of the night to catch the blow from the other boat's boilers up ahead. They rounded a bend and Lucy gasped. "Look! Up ahead, Steve."

He nodded. "Cram some more wood in those boilers, O'Shean," he called down the tube. "We're going to get ahead of the *Texas Star* tonight or blow ourselves sky high!"

- 4 -



THE *Texas Star* had sighted them, too, and tried for a new burst of speed. But, as Steve had anticipated, his boat could make better time in this shallower water. Rolf had to keep his big side wheeler in the middle of the stream, fighting the current, constantly veering away from the sand bars that rubbed her bottom. The *Lucy Furman*, drawing less water, could take greater chances passing over shoals and bars.

Soon, Steve could look across the river and see the face of Cass Rolf in the lighted pilot-house of the other boat. He had not changed in four years. His face was still deeply tanned by the weather. His black, curly hair was streaked gray over the temples and he wore a crisp, gray mustache. His teeth were tightly clamped on a cigar as he tooled his wheel with the sure, sensitive touch of the master. He handled a steamboat like a conductor drawing beautiful music from a great symphony.

As the boats drew abreast, he glanced over at Steve and his teeth flashed in a tight grin.

Suddenly, aboard the *Texas Star*, a gun winked and glass shattered in the pilot house.

"Get down!" Steve shouted to the girl. He yelled down his tube for the first mate to break out their rifles and answer the fire from the other boat.

Soon, there were flashes of steady gunfire on both steamboats. Steve tried to concentrate on navigating the dangerous stream while lead buzzed around his head like angry hornets and thudded into the pilot-house walls.

"That's Howard Martin's doings on the *Texas Star*," the girl cried from her crouching position on the floor. "He's given them the order to shoot at us."

"I suspect that Rolf seconded the motion," Steve grunted. He loosened his sixgun in his belt and headed the *Lucy Furman* closer to the other boat, feeling his way over the dangerous bottom.

A good riverboat pilot knew by many signs when his boat was close to ripping its hull open on a hidden rock or shoal. The way the boat responded to the rudder, changes in the rhythm of the engines, the kind of vibrations in the superstructure, the imperceptible changes in speed as the vessel moved from one depth of water to another. A slight tug away from an underwater obstruction.

All these things Cass Rolf had taught Steve when he was a cub pilot. The long, silent nights that they had stood together in the pilot house and Rolf had held the wheel between his finger tips, with his head tipped slightly to one side. "Listen, boy," he'd said softly. "That old boat is talking to you. Hear what she says in the rigging? She says we're getting too close to a sand bar. Look how she's shying away, like a boogered horse ..." Steve remembered how Cass had talked half to himself, with his eyes closed, as if in a reverie. Sometimes, it seemed that to Rolf a steamboat was a living thing with a language he could understand.

Now, Steve had the weird sensation that Rolf was standing at his elbow, whispering instructions, guiding him through every motion. And that was crazy because he was going after Cass Rolf, to kill him for stealing his girl and his boat.

STEVE WIPED the back of his hand across his eyes. He swung the boat even closer to the *Texas Star*. Lucy was screaming at him to pull away, that he'd get himself killed. Bullets were shattering the glass, whipping through the pilot house, splintering wood.

He drew his pistol, laid it across one

arm that held the wheel. He fired and saw glass fly on the other boat's pilot house. Rolf looked at him, only a few hundred feet away. Then, there was a gun in his hand, too, and he was answering Steve's shots.

The next bullet Steve fired got very close to the mark. He saw splinters of wood fly from the wheel on the *Texas Star*, and Rolf fell back from it. Rolf turned toward him and the smile on his face had turned into a snarl. The sixgun in his hand blazed until it was out of ammunition.

Kent laughed and yelled. "You might be a better pilot than me, Cass Rolf, but you're a lousy shot!" He swung the wheel and the two boats came together with a crash of their guards. Gunfire roared on both vessels. The night was split apart by the howl of wounded men.

Steve took careful aim. "You took my boat and my woman, Rolf," he cried. "And I'm going to send you to the bottom of the river for it!"

But before he could fire, he felt the hard round muzzle of a gun dig into his back.

"Get this boat out where it's safe," Lucy Furman snapped behind him in quick, angry tones. "You're going to get us all killed and sink this boat. I'm paying you to get to those furs, not fight a private war!" She dug at him with the pistol. "I mean it, Steve Kent. 'I'll shoot you and run this damn boat myself if I have to!'"

The red haze of fury faded somewhat from Steve's vision. Something in the girl's voice assured him that she meant exactly what she said. He tossed his gun to the leather couch. He swore and spun the wheel, stopping it with his foot braced against a bottom spoke. The *Lucy Furman* heeled away from the other boat. In a few minutes there was enough distance between them that the rifle fire ceased.

Then Steve turned. The girl was still standing there, her chin set

firmly and a small derringer held expertly in a white fist. "I'm sorry," she said, "but you were out of your head."

"You little fool," Steve swore, "if you'd left me alone another minute I would have finished him."

She rubbed her wrist, her gray eyes wide. "Those furs are the important thing—remember that. You and Rolf can settle your squabble later."

She left the pilot-house then, and Steve directed his attention to the river. In his heart, he knew she was right. He'd had no business risking old Dupree and Peychaud's boat, not to mention all their lives. But, seeing Cass Rolf at the helm of his *Texas Star* so close, knowing that Emily was somewhere on that boat, too, and every night that Rolf left the pilot-house she was waiting for him in their cabin, with her beautiful arms . . . all that had driven him a little mad crazy for a moment.

DOWN THE river, a half mile behind him, Steve could see that the *Texas Star* had tied up at the river bank to check her damage and wounded. Steve decided to do the same thing. "We're stopping for a few minutes," he called down to O'Shean, "but keep your steam up in case we have to leave in a hurry." Then he posted a look-out to keep an eye on the *Texas Star* behind them, and he went to check on his boat.

They had one crewman dead and three pretty badly wounded. Lucy Furman, who had been a volunteer nurse in some of the large Confederate hospitals during the war, tended to them out of the ship's first aid supplies. Steve helped until she had them resting easy. Then he saw to the damage to the boat. When he rammed the side of the *Texas Star*, he'd opened his hull in a few places at about water level. She wasn't taking much water, however, and the ship's carpenter was

already repairing the damage. "Have her water tight in an hour again," he reported cheerfully.

Then Steve checked with O'Shean to find if the engines had suffered any. In the engine room, he found a white-faced Alec Dupree and Frank Peychaud hiding behind the boilers.

Mike O'Shean, stripped to the waist, grease smeared and sweating, sent a stream of tobacco into a sandbox and wiped the back of his hand across his lips. "'Tis a lot more fun than pill rollin', now ain't it, boys?"

STEVE SOON had the *Lucy Furman* underway to widen their lead on the *Texas Star*. Rolf's boat must have suffered more hull damage because she was still tied up when they started up the river. From now on it would no longer be a race of speed, but a matching of skills between two pilots to see which could bring his boat across the dangerously low river. Up here, Steve could no longer use his relief pilot since the man did not know the upper river. But, likewise, Cass Rolf would have to do all the piloting on his boat. Only he and Steve knew this river, and he had taught Steve.

Kent stayed at the wheel as long as he could, then they would tie up at the bank while he got a few hours sleep. His other pilot spent some time in the pilot-house, studying the river so that he could help in the navigation back.

"This looks like a bad spot," he said as they rounded a bend and came on some shallow looking water, several days later.

"Sioux Crossing," Steve told him. "In another two weeks you'll be able to walk across the river here barefooted and not get the top of your ankles wet. We're going to have a run on our hands to get back over this shoal. Otherwise, we'll be holed up in Fort Benton for the rest of the winter."

"That should be pleasant," the pilot muttered, "with Rolf and his boys potting at us every night to get

those furs back. I should have stuck to the lower Mississippi."

That night, Lucy Furman came up to the pilot-house. It was the first time in nearly a week, since their brush with the *Texas Star*, that she had been there. Day and night, she had been with the wounded men, sleeping only in snatches. Now her face was lined with fatigue.

She was wearing her golden hair in a simple bun on the nape of her neck with a blue ribbon tied around it. The top button of her blouse was open and her face was damp with perspiration. She stood by an open window to let the breeze cool her. "They're out of danger, thank God," she said.

Steve looked at her. She was a beautiful, capable woman. She was one southern belle with an aristocratic background who didn't mind soiling her hands with a little hard work. "You've done a fine job with those men," Steve said, simply. "They owe you their lives."

She said nothing and they were both silent for a spell.

The moon came from behind a cloud and spread its silver on the winding stream. "The river is beautiful tonight," Lucy murmured.

"It's always beautiful," Steve said, softly.

She turned. "You love the river, don't you?"

Steve ran his gaze along the dark banks and the rippling surface that was both beautiful and dangerous, like the tawny hide of a tiger hiding muscles that could kill in one blow. "I love the river, I guess. I was brought up on her. But I'm going to leave it after I settle my trouble with Cass."

Her eyes widened. "You're leaving the river? For good?"

Steve explained, "The river is done for. The railroads are going to kill her off. I saw how powerful they could be during the war. There'll be another ten, maybe fifteen years of

heavy shipping on the river. But the day is not too far away when there won't be a single riverboat left steaming from St. Louis to New Orleans." His eyes gazed across the river, into the past. "I saw her when she was proud and mighty and bein' a riverboat pilot was the greatest thing in the world—next to bein' president of the United States. I don't want to be around when she dies."

HE POINTED toward the west. "That's the way I'm heading... west. There's a new land rising out there. I like to be in at the start of things—not the end."

She looked at him curiously. Then she moved close to him and laid her hand on his arm. Her voice was vibrant with emotion. "Why don't you head out there, Steve as soon as we get those furs back to New Orleans? Why have this foolish battle with Cass Rolf, and maybe get yourself killed!"

"Why are you so interested? Seems like you've been tryin' to talk me out of killin' Rolf ever since you bailed me out of that calaboose in New Orleans."

She lowered her eyes, but did not answer.

After a moment, Steve said stubbornly, "There are some things a man has to do."

Her eyes suddenly blazed. She said through her teeth, "You must love her an awful lot!"

Steve raised his brows.

"That woman," she said, spitting out the word as if it were something she'd bitten into with a foul taste. "That Emily Latour. You must really love her. It isn't because of the *Texas Star* you're going to kill a man who was once your best friend. You were ready to ram the boat back yonder. It's the woman you and Rolf are fighting over."

Steve did not answer that.

She turned away angrily. "I guess I hate her because I envy any woman

who has a man so damn fool in love with her that he'll follow her up seven hundred miles of dirty river and get himself shot at—"

Her voice suddenly broke. Steve touched her hand. She drew away from him. Her back to him, she said in a muffled voice, "I might as well tell you for the record that I love you, Steve Kent. I've loved you since I was a girl riding on the boats you piloted. You never knew who I was. Just another girl passenger going from St. Louis to New Orleans with her father. But I knew who you were all right. I used to see you up in the pilot house, cocky and good looking. The youngest pilot on the river. And I loved you so much I couldn't eat on the entire trip."

Suddenly, she faced him. Her hands reached up and her fingers dug into his shoulders. Her level gray eyes met his steadily. She raised her chin and suddenly, she was on tiptoes and her warm, red mouth was against his, trembling and soft. Then she breathed huskily, "Now, go on and find your two-timing French tramp... and see if she can match that—"

In tears, she rushed from the pilot house.

- 5 -



THEY NEVER again sighted the *Texas Star* behind them. They reached the fur trapping post in a few days. As Lucy Furman had said, there was a huge cargo of furs waiting for them. This one haul would pay Alec Dupree and Frank Peychaud back the cost of the boat. And Steve would be well rewarded for his work. Lucy Furman, herself, would be a wealthy young woman when she sold her interest in the furs.

They headed back down the river with the furs on board, racing now to get to Sioux Crossing before the river fell any more.

Days passed and there was still no sign of the *Texas Star*. "Do you suppose they gave up and went back to the Mississippi?" Mike O'Shean asked one afternoon, coming up to the *TEXAS* deck for a breath of air.

"Not Howard Martin," Lucy said. "If I know him, he'll not give up until I have the furs home, safely."

"More than likely," Steve predicted, they're laying for us somewhere down the river. Rolf was smart enough to know he'd never beat us to that fur trapping post once we got a strong lead on him in this part of the river. So, he's let us go on and he's waiting to jump us somewhere on the way home."

O'Shean bit off a fresh chew savagely. "Thin, we'd best get ourselves ready, eh, lad?"

"Just what I was thinking," Steve agreed. "I'm going to have the mate arm the crew with Colt side arms and Sharps rifles. We'll pile some of the cordwood around the bow of the lower deck for a breastwork. We'll let them know they tackled something when they try to stop us!"

From that moment on, Steve kept an armed watch out twenty four hours a day. They proceeded as fast as the low river would permit. Then, when they came around a bend and up against the worst barrier, the bar across Sioux Crossing, they found the *Texas Star* waiting on the other side of the bar.

Steve was in the pilot-house with his first mate. He swore softly when he saw the other boat. "Well, they picked a good spot for it. They knew we'll have trouble getting across that sand bar. They're hoping to keep us on this side until the river drops a few more feet. Then they'll have us bottled up here for the rest of the winter and they can take their time,

picking us off one by one until they get the furs."

The mate grunted. "They been keepin' steam up, just waiting there..."

"Get your men on the main deck behind that cordwood. Give them plenty of ammunition and tell them there'll be a ten dollar bonus for every man they can pick off the *Texas Star*. And if there's anybody on this boat that hasn't the stomach for a fight, tell 'em the left bank is the closest and to start swimming now!"

"Aye, sir," the mate grinned and left the pilot-house.

Steve asked O'Shean to get up a full head of steam.

"What'll I do with these two old pill rollers?" O'Shean wanted to know. "They're hidin' behind the boiler again!"

Steve grinned tightly. "Tell 'em that's a good place; they can hear the noise fine there if the boilers blow up. Now cram all the wood you can get in and sit on the safety valve, O'Shean. We're going across that bar!"

Steve looked up at the twin chimneys towering high above him. Sun glinted off the giltwork on the spreader bars between the stacks. Then white cordwood smoke poured out like a cotton streamer against the blue sky.

Steve pulled the whistle, signaled for full speed ahead. The *Lucy Furman* shuddered and drove for the sand bar.

Steve heard someone come into the pilot-house. He glanced out of the corner of his eye and saw Lucy with a Sharps rifle in her hand.

"Get below," he ordered. "They're going to be shooting at this pilot-house."

"I know," she said calmly, "and you'll be too busy to shoot back." She took her station beside a window, "I know how to use one of these things, you know," she said, gripping the rifle.

Steve grinned. "I wouldn't be surprised."

He felt the boat scrape the sand at the same minute that rifles began popping on the *Texas Star*.

Steve was too busy then, handling the steering wheel and bell cord to pay any heed to the flying lead. The bottom grew shallower. Then the *Lucy Furman* shuddered to a halt. She was stuck.

STEVE SIGNALLED for reverse, full speed. The stern paddles churned the water, driving water under the hull, lifting the boat and pulling her back off the sand bar at the same time. Sweat poured down Steve's face. Finally, he got her backed to safer waters. He spun the wheel and signaled for full speed ahead again, and tried it in another spot. This time they got further before he stuck. Again he used the backing maneuver. This time he determined to attack the same spot, driving forward, backing when they got too badly stuck, then going forward again, and either batter their way over the sand bar or stick there permanently. He knew he would find no deeper crossing anywhere on the bar.

"May the Saints preserve us," O'Shean called up the tube, "these boiler plates are groanin', Steve. She won't bear much more of this pressure, I'm thinkin'."

"Keep the safety valves down," Steve ordered. "We might as well be blown up as get stuck here and be picked off by Martin's sharp shooters on the *Texas Star*."

Dimly, he was aware of Lucy, kneeling at one window, squinting along the barrel of her Sharps rifle. He heard the roar of her gun. At the same time, the boat gave a tremendous groan through the timbers in her hull as she stuck mightily. The rear paddles churned the water into seething white froth.

She held there, shivering, while the

sweat soaked Steve Kent's shirt and he talked to her like a man coaxing a game horse into a final great effort. "Come on, lady, come on..."

Then she shuddered and bounced free, wallowing into the deeper water. A wild cheer came up from the men below. Steve sighed with relief. He spun the wheel and headed her directly for the *Texas Star*. They were over the sand bar!

"Brace yourselves and keep shooting," he yelled at the men on the deck through his megaphone. "We're going to ram her!"

"White smoke belched from the *Texas Star* as Rolf saw his intentions and tried to back away. But, with the sharp maneuverability of his boat, Steve whipped around and caught him amidships, driving the prow of the *Lucy Furman* into the side paddle wheel of the other boat. There was a tremendous crash, and Steve backed away.

Crippled now, with one of her power wheels out of commission, the *Texas Star* wallowed helplessly, while Steve cruised around her, giving his rifle men good shots at the men running for cover on the other boat. Soon he saw the *Texas Star* beginning to list and he knew they'd opened her hull when they rammed her.

The sun was beginning to set. Soon the rifles looked like fireflies, winking in the twilight. Then Steve saw a ruddy glow begin to light the *Texas Star* amidships.

"She's on fire," Lucy Furman gasped. "Look, her crew is jumping overboard and swimming for the shore." Her white face turned him.

"We'd better back away, hadn't we? If she sinks much lower in the water her boilers will explode."

Steve called his relief pilot to the wheel. He gave orders to take the *Lucy Furman* out of the danger zone. Then he ran down to the main deck and ordered his crew to lower a boat. As he swung over the side of the

steamboat, Lucy caught his arm. "Are you crazy, Steve? She'll blow up before you get there!"

Steve tried to shake her hand loose, but she clung to him. The ruddy light from the burning steamboat played across her face. Tears streaked her cheeks. "Why are you risking your life, Steve...to save *her*?"

HHE DIDN'T answer. He pushed her away and dropped down to the boat. He grabbed up the oars, but then Mike O'Shean's grease smeared face appeared over the railing. "Wait for me you blasted son," the engineer swore. "You're always wantin' to run off without me when there's fun to be had!"

O'Shean dropped into the boat with him. They took up the oars and propelled the small boat across the river to the badly listing *Texas Star*. O'Shean whistled. "May, the good Saints preserve us when them boilers hit the water!"

Up on the hurricane deck of the burning vessel, a figure appeared with a rifle. He leveled the gun and water spewed up a few feet from their oars. O'Shean let out a string of curses. "From the looks of that one, he's that Howard Martin Miss Lucy spoke about. Plumb out of his head he is, because he didn't get them furs."

Steve drew his revolver. He aimed as best he could in the rocking boat and fired once. The figure on the hurricane deck stiffened. The rifle slid out of his hands and he rolled over the railing, falling into the water below. It was the end of a man who tried to grab a king's ransom in furs that rightfully belonged to his late partner's daughter...

They touched the sinking vessel. "You stay in the boat," Steve ordered. "Keep her close by."

He climbed up on the deck of the *Texas Star*. Then he ran up to the hurricane and looked through glassed windows into the cabins, searching for Emily Latour.

Finally, in a cabin amidships, he saw her huddled on the floor, covering her face with her hands and sobbing hysterically. He tried to open her cabin door, but it was locked. Out of her mind with fear, the girl had run into the cabin and locked the door. Now, no matter how he beat on the door, he could not make her open it.

He looked down. The big boat was even lower in the water. Those boilers were going any minute. He braced himself and kicked at the door as hard as he could. After the second kick, the lock splintered. He threw the door open and went in after the dark-haired girl. In the cabin, he picked her up and threw her over one shoulder. Still hysterical, she beat at his back and kicked her long legs wildly. Steve carried her to the deck railing. He shouted to Mike O'Shean below, and then threw the girl wriggling and screaming overboard. He watched to see that O'Shean fished her out of the water then he yelled, "Get her back to the *Lucy Furman*, Mike!"

He went up the companionway to the texas deck, three steps at a time. But half way up, he stopped. Cass Rolf stood at the top of the steps with a whiskey bottle in his hand. He was three quarters drunk. He tilted the bottle, drained its remaining contents, and laughed at Steve. "So you've come to settle an old account, eh, boy?" He laughed again, and threw the bottle at Steve.

He ducked, but too late. It caught him on the forehead, and knocked him down to the hurricane deck. Through a haze, he saw Rolf coming down the steps. He saw the man leap, and he knew the pilot's heels were aimed at his chest. In the nick of time, he rolled and felt the deck shudder as Cass struck it, inches away.

STEVE SCRAMBLED to his feet. Blood was running down his face from the cut on his forehead. The licking flames played a ruddy glow

over the two big men who stood panting, facing each other on the sinking ship's deck.

"You'll never take her away from me, boy," Rolf breathed, flexing his big hands. "She's the devil's own woman, but she's in my blood, God help me. Nobody will take her away from me!"

He rushed at Steve and the two locked and rolled across the deck. Rolf picked up a stick of wood and swung it at Steve's head. Kent grabbed his arm, wriggled from under him and got to his feet. Again Cass attacked him, but Steve met him with swinging fists. He drove Rolf back against a cabin wall with blood running down his face. Rolf sidestepped, got away from him.

Again the two bloody men faced each other on the deck, blistering now from the blazing heat. The shirt was torn half off Cass Rolf. In the ruddy flames, his dark skin, bulging with muscles under it, glistened in a bath of sweat.

Steve wiped the blood out of his eyes. He circled the other man warily. Cass was a good fighter; he'd battled his way from one end of the river to the other in his lifetime. They say he'd never lost a fight or a race on the Mississippi.

He rushed Steve again. This time, the younger pilot ducked a whistling blow and drove a hard uppercut into Rolf's solar plexus. Rolf's breath whistled through his teeth. He backed with a smile of pain. Kent swung again, and hit him a hard blow on the cheek bone. Rolf tried to bring his guard up, but it was weak. Steve hit him again. He knew he had the fight now. He walked Cass Rolf back across the deck with stinging rights and lefts to the face, until the older man fell against the cabin wall. Steve hit him one more time. Rolf's eyes glazed and he slid down the wall and lay in a still heap.

Steve stood over him, swaying, his chest heaving. "That's for a lot of things, Rolf," he panted. "For stealing the *Lone Star* and taking Emily..."

He turned and staggered to the railing. He knew, if he hurried, he could jump into the water and swim to safety before the boilers blew sky high.

But, he could not swing over the side of the boat. He stood there, wiping his hand across his eyes. Things were in his heart that should not be there. Bruised by Rolf's fists, he should be thinking only that he was glad he'd won the fight and that Cass was going to die. Instead, he heard a voice in his memory, a low, steady voice, teaching him the ways of the river.

"Well, easy boy... that old boat is talking to you. Hear what she says in the rigging? She says we're getting too close to a sand bar. Look how she's shying away, like a boogeed horse..."

The past tugged at him. He saw a boy, sitting on a dock, looking with awed eyes up at a steamboat and the great pilot at her helm. "Some day," that boy said, "I'm gonna get Cass Rolf to learn me to be a pilot."

"G'wan," one of the other boys chided, "Rolf would never bother to spit on you, much lesse'n take you on as his cub."

"You'll see..." the boy who had been Steve Kent muttered.

And sure enough, one day he'd stood behind the big steering wheel of a river-boat and Rolf was putting a friendly hand on his shoulder and saying, "Now you pay attention to what I say, boy. I'm going to learn you everything I know. I'm going to make you one of the best pilots on this here river, and everybody's going to say, 'See that pilot, that Steve Kent? Cass Rolf learned him the river.'"

And Rolf *had* taught him the river. But that was another matter and another time. For the last three years, he had thought of only one thing—of

Cass Rolf in Emily's soft white arms, and of coming home to kill Cass for that. And now, he had done it. He had whipped Rolf, and all he had to do was jump to safety. The exploding boilers of the *Lone Star* would do the killing.

That easily, he could kill this man who had been his idol, his teacher, and his best friend...

Slowly, Steve wiped a tear from his eye. He turned and lifted Rolf's limp body. He carried him to the side of the vessel and slipped into the water, holding him.

IT WAS LATE the next day. Steve was behind the wheel of the *Lucy Furman*, heading down the river.

Lucy came into the pilot house and stood by the window. "Well, your passengers are resting easy," she said bitterly. "I'll never be able to understand men. You beat Cass Rolf to a pulp and then bring him back here for me to nurse back to health."

"I guess," Steve said, "men don't always understand themselves."

She said, then, "I just saw Alec Dupree and Frank Peychaud on the hurricane deck. They've had their fill of steamboating; when we get back to New Orleans, they're going back to the drug store business." Suddenly she turned and walked over to Steve. Her chin was high. She held out a hand. "Well, congratulations, Steve Kent. You went after your woman and you brought her back. I w-wish you a lot

of happiness with her when you go west, though she'll probably double-cross you again the first chance she has."

"She probably would," Steve drawled slowly. He looked at Lucy Furman with a smile tugging at his lips and a mischievous gleam twinkling in his eye. "Besides that, she's afraid of guns. Man going to the West ought to have a woman along who knows how to shoot. Indians out there."

Her lips parted and her throat worked. "Steve," she whispered huskily. "Don't... don't make fun of me."

"Maybe," he said; "I've been like Alec Dupree and Frank Peychaud all this time. I thought I wanted something that looked glamorous, exciting and important. I guess I had to come out here to see the real worth of things. You've got more courage and character in your little finger than Emily Latour ever had in her entire selfish soul. I got what I came after—I gave Rolf a good licking. Now he can have Emily; it'll serve him right to have to live with her for the rest of his life."

"Steve," she whispered, with trembling lips. Her big gray eyes stared at him, brimming with tears.

"Come here and kiss me," Steve commanded gruffly. "I want to see if you kiss that well all the time. Or if it was an accident."

It was no accident. She really did!

15 More Topnotch Yarns

featuring

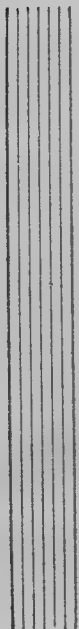
CRY VENGEANCE by Burt Arthur
THE SUBSTITUTE

Judge Steele story by Lon Williams

These and 13 others are complete in the September

WESTERN ACTION

**THE
ROPING
OF
DRY-
GULCH
McBAIN**



by
Edward
Garner

Drygulch McBain lived a life of stain,
And lawmen would rave and rare
When they saw him ride, guns at his side,
With a look that was debonair.
He sneered and leered and was rightly feared,
For his guns spoke a harsh command,
That sheriffs heard, and then inferred
It was best they not countermand!

He stood six four, or a trifle more,
With two hundred pounds of meat,
And his face was rough and his look was tough,
And his eyes were as cold as sleet.
His hands were hams like battering rams,
That could crush and could pulverize,
That others saw with a touch of awe,
And turned from with dismayed sighs.

Billy-the-Kid stood high amid
The citizens known as tough,
And old Wild Bill wasn't run of the mill
When things got a trifle rough;
Drygulch McBain, with a cold disdain,
Stood tops in the bad man's clan,
For where the Kid and Wild Bill left off
Was where McBain began!

McBain did wrong when he stole a strong
And ready-for-market herd,
And drove it down the road to town
With many a sinful word!
Its owner came, with her eyes aflame,
A girl named Sue Malone,
And her vengeful wrath made a thorn-flecked path
McBain had to tread alone!

She turned her cows with some uttered vows
That McBain would pay and pay,
And they did not roam on their way back home.
For McBain showed them the way.
He led the way, we can rightly say,
For her gun in his muscled side
Was all required—by it inspired
He made an unerring guide!

Dawn followed dawn, the years passed on,
While she kept McBain her slave,
To round up steers and abstain from beers,
And wish he were in his grave!
She did not flinch, did not budge an inch,
And McBain walked a straight, straight line,
And he often paled as his soul bewailed
His lot—with no anodyne.

The last great blow he was to know,
It carried a great dismay,
Was when Sue spoke, firm as an oak,
And said, "We'll get hitched today!"
He pleaded long, but her will was strong,
And the parson who tied the twain
Said in afteryears that he saw tears
In the eyes of Drygulch McBain!

Bart opened up on the fancy
crystal chandeliers...



No strangers were allowed on the great Fox range, and no one knew very much about this man who also owned most of the town — except that he had a large crew of gunmen. Bart Lyons learned that much the night he drifted in — and also learned something else important: that there was a lovely girl virtually a prisoner at the ranch house, and that whatever Fox did do, he didn't raise cattle!

THE SECRET OF FOX RANGE

Novel of Sinister Schemes

by ELTON WEBSTER

THE BIG puncher reined the pinto in and twisted his muscular body around in saddle to listen curiously. That popping of brush and thudding of hooves up on the hillside might mean nothing in particular—or anything. Anyway, when a traveler rides a lonesome foothills trail in a country of rough range and rougher men, he likes to know what is going on around him.

The sounds receded up the rugged hillside for a little way, then swung nearer as the puncher started the pert little horse on. He halted again when, upon reaching the upper level, he found that he was riding away from whatever was being chased and whoever was doing the chasing. "Cut across our trail, Pete," he deduced, then turned and rode slowly back down the meandering bridle path, keeping his keen steel-blue eyes on the ground. On the sandy floor of a dry branch he had crossed a minute before the sign lay clear. "Huh," he grunted, "feller on a long-stridin' hoss fannin' it after a cow critter like hell heatin' tanbark.

"I'm wonderin'—"

Somewhere down on the brushy flat that separated the big hill from a bigger one to eastward, a shot had sounded, followed by the agonized bawl of a stricken beast. Another shot ripped out, then silence.

"Well now, I *am* wonderin'!" Twisting the mincing little pinto around, the puncher sent him rocketing back up the white trail. At the crest of the hill, he drew-rein and stood up in stirrups to look the flat over.

Waving sage brush lay golden-green in the warm fall sunshine that bathed the slope. Below, a willow clump, indicating water, formed an oasis of green centering a small desert of barren limestone, with here and there a scrub cedar or a sentinel cottonwood. No sign of life showed anywhere; not a sound drifted up.

The puncher tilted back the brim of his big pearl hat and scratched his curly blond thatch thoughtfully. Of course, an owner sometimes went out and shot his beef that way. *Sometimes*, understand. More frequently when a

man ran a cow brute down and shot it, that man was either a meat thief or a hide rustler—or both.

The puncher knew that such an occurrence should be investigated and that every plainsman should be a detective, in such a case. But he was hungry and saddle-weary, and night was coming on. A great black cloud beating down from the northwest promised rain. "Tain't my country," he shrugged, after a little time, then started Pete into the steady, distance-eating job that was the wiry little horse's ordinary traveling gait.

As the trail wormed out on the plateau, the brush thinned and curly dun buffalo sod displaced the sparse bunch grass that stood among the brush. A couple of miles across the plain, another green shoreline showed. Still beyond, serried pinnacles glowed with rose and gold as the sun nestled among them. Then the drifting cloud-bank rolled suddenly across them, curtaining off the reflected light, bringing the night and with it a dank chill that seemed to leap up from the dark swales. A minute later, a wind-driven shift of misty rain chilled his face. The puncher untied his slicker from its strings back of the cantle and donned it: "Kinda blinky night a-comin'," he grumbled. "No house in sight, yet. C'mon little hoss, yuh've done a plenty for one day, but we gotta get somewhere."

Jaded, but game, the pinto swung into a lope. Ten minutes later, the path curved northward to parallel the timber for a little way, then turned sharply to westward into the brush.

Then the puncher reined Pete in with a jerk and rubbed his startled eyes and announced that he would "just naturally be damned."

Standing in a rounded bay in the timber to the right of the road was the biggest house the traveler had ever seen anywhere. It was more than a house; it was a sand-stone castle of the style of the feudal period—a massive,

turreted structure, its three stories aglow with light. Backgrounding it, outbuildings showed indistinctly. Among them was a long, low-eaved building which the staring puncher recognized at once as a bunkhouse.

With the instinct of a true stockman, the puncher noted a certain lack of proportion about the place. There was but one small corral, and in it not more than two dozen horses. No cows were in sight.

"Whew-ee! Some layout, Pete," the puncher drawled, starting his horse along the winding path that led up to the broad doorway. "Five chimneys! 'Bout a hundred windows! 'Lectric lights, or I'm a sheepherder! It shore is lucky we—

"Eh?"

WHERE THE path ran between two big cottonwoods, perhaps a dozen yards from the house, Pete had snorted and surged back when two men showed suddenly in the gloom, one on each side of the path, they evidently had been waiting behind the trees. Each had a rifle held at a ready, and their attitude was strictly businesslike. "Steady as is, feller," one of them, a squat, black-bearded man said gruffly, thrusting the muzzle of his gun almost against the puncher's stomach. "Don't move none till I say when an' how. Git aroun' behind 'im, Bill. Shoot 'is backbone in two if he wiggles even a little bit."

"Nice friendly welcome to this man's country," the puncher remarked, dryly. "Shore I'll set steady. I wanta git me a look at th' damndest span of jugheads I ever laid eyes on. Wish th' light was a little better so I could—"

"Shut up," the whiskered fellow at Pete's head snapped. "Now keep your hands away from that hardware an' start your horse real slow."

"Watch 'im close, Bill."

"What's going on out there, Abelson?" a full, smooth voice called from the house.

"Caught a ranny prowl'in' aroun' out here," the man at Pete's head answered. "We're fetchin' 'im in."

"Peel that belt off 'im, Bill."

The front door swung open and a porch light winked on, showing one that the puncher knew at once was the master of the place.

He was a big, square-rigged man with an athletic figure that was outlined clearly by a well-fitted dinner jacket. His face was smooth, handsome and might have been termed friendly but for the fixed, cynical smile and the arrogant black eyes. His linen was spotless, his tie arranged neatly, his wealth of brown hair cut and combed in a way that gave him an almost boyish appearance, despite the glint of grey that showed at the temples. Sleek, polished, he looked as much out of place in the hills country as a man could; yet, nowhere about him was the slightest hint of the tenderfoot or weakling. He stood looking down at the three in the yard for a time; then turned and strolled inside, calling back over his shoulder. "Bring him in and be lively about it."

"You heard 'im," the man called Abelson prompted, as the puncher sat staring after the owner's broad back, with such curious interest that he scarcely felt Bill slip his double-holstered belt off.

"Slide down," Abelson snapped again. "Th' boss told me to fetch you in, an' when th' boss tells you somethin' Monday evenin', he don't mean fur you to wait till th' next Monday evenin' to do it."

"Slidin'," the puncher announced, commencing to dismount. "Most usual I get kinda ringylike when some geezer tries to tell me where to head in. Right now, though, I'm admittin' that this house an' that galoot's got me kinda buffaloed. I'd admire to find out more about 'em."

"Mebbe you'll find out a hell of a lot more'n yuh're wantin' to," Abelson suggested, then handed Pete's rein to Bill

and fell in behind the puncher, who had started up the broad porch steps.

"Well, don't prod me with that gun barrel that way," the captive protested. "It makes me feel like a steer bein' punched up a chute into a car. 'Sides that, I was raised a pet, you know, so—"

"Gallopin' lizards! Would you look at that!"

WITH THE alert Abelson tramping at his heels, the traveler had crossed the porch and entered a vestibule where an assortment of storm coats and wraps hung on a mirrored hall tree. Directly in line with an inner door was a fireplace where leaping flames licked at a cedar backlog. Leaning against the mantel there, was the person that the puncher had referred to as "that."

She was young, tall, willowy, blonde, supremely attractive in an ivory satin dinner gown that set off the lines of her trim figure, cameolike. She was speaking in a low tone, and, near the other end of the mantel a man's forearm and elbow showed.

"Gosh," the puncher rumbled, admiringly as he halted on the threshold of the inner door and removed his hat to shake the light beads of moisture off it by slapping it against his leg. When she turned her deep violet eyes his way for a fleeting instant, he fairly trembled at the sheer beauty of her. Then she turned away and left the room by a door that led toward the rear. In there, he saw a Chinese servant padding noiselessly about a table that was draped in damask and a-glitter with silver and crystal. Above, an ornate chandelier cast prismatic rays through dozens of dangling crystals.

Before the girl closed the door, the puncher saw another woman, also in dinner attire, who was heavy and white haired, but still maintained a poise and carriage that marked her as one accustomed to being admired.

"Be with you in a moment," the master called in to them as the door

closed behind the girl. Then he turned and deliberately looked his guest over, from the crown of his yellow head to the spurred heels of his boots. There was something so deliberately contemptuous in the man's cool inspection, that the cowboy felt his cheeks flush with resentment.

"Real plains hat, batwing chaps, hairy cowskin vest, picturated cuffs," the other invoiced, coolly. "Lone stars on the cuffs of his gauntlets and those conchas on his belt and hatband must have been beaten out of Mexican pesos.

"Hum-m! Certainly a southwestern-er—probably a Texan. What's your name, waddy?"

The puncher felt his face flame hotter. "Down Amarilla way where I drifted from, we get our gun about half undressed before we call a man a 'waddy', Mister. That means a prairie tramp—all aroun' nogood jasper, you know."

The host tilted his handsome head back and chuckled delightedly. "That's the reason I called you that—just to find out where you came from.

"But, I asked you your name." He ceased chuckling and barked impatiently, "Well, I'm listening."

"Name's Lyons—Bart Lyons." He looked the other over with a reflection of his host's cool impudence, then said, "That's one-half of a interduction, Mister."

Again the host laughed lightly. Again he ceased abruptly to frown and snap out another question: "What were you doing around here?"

"Nothin'—just nothin' a-tall," Bart answered. "I'm just in this country on my way out of it. That is, I was intendin' to ooze right on up into th' Black Hills. But now, I dunno. You got me kinda spinnin', you know, an' I may decide to graze here-about's till I git a line on th' country.

"You see. I've heard about Dakoty ever since I was a kid, but I never knowed before that th' ranchers out here lived in story-book houses an' stripped for chuck—dinner, I mean—

an' wore silk braid on their pants an'—"

"Never mind all that," the other cut in. "We'll assume that there's a lot that you don't know. For instance, perhaps you didn't know that no one is allowed to come on this place except by my invitation."

"I shore didn't. Just was joggin' along a trail an' hit this. I'm plumb glad I come, though. I've seen strange sights here—plumb enlightenin', yuh know."

The master of the house looked Bart over again, then glanced at the clock on the mantel and turned to nod to Abelson, who was standing by the door, his rifle at a ready. "It's about dinner time, and the ladies mustn't be kept waiting."

"Guess he's all right. Take him out on the trail and start him back in the direction from which he came. I don't believe he belongs in this country."

Bart's simmering rage boiled over. "Don't think I belong in this country eh? Well, let me tell yuh this, Mister. I belong wherever I take a damn good notion to stay. Get that?"

The host looked slightly bored. "I get it, but it doesn't mean anything. Nobody stays in this section unless I say so."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. I mean just that."

Mad through and through, Bart still was puzzled at the other's adamant attitude and cool assurance. He was conscious that the door to the dining room had inched open a little way and he saw the girl indistinctly through the narrow opening. "Well, we may not agree, feller," he declared. "As I said a bit ago, I was intendin' to slide right on out of this man's country." He fixed his eyes impudently on the spot where he knew the girl stood, and added speculatively: "But now I may decide to stay right on this range permanent."

Despite his rage, Bart could not forbear grinning appreciatively when two white hands showed in the partly-open

doorway, patted noiselessly in silent applause, then were withdrawn quickly. Bart spoke up. "Yeah, I'm stayin'—stayin' till hell freezes over."

"Suit yourself," the host said, with a bored air. "I'm sure I'm not in the least interested in what you *think* you're going to do." He glanced at the clock again. "Dinner time. Get him out of here and start him down the trail, Abelson. If he makes any trouble, shoot him. Better give his guns back to him. We can handle him easily enough if he gets nasty—which I don't think he will, after he thinks things over."

"But wait a second." He turned to Bart. "Hungry?"

"Thought I was, but I've changed my mind. I got only a light snack in my saddlebags, an' th' trail is dark an' it's promisin' to sleet. But I'll make out some way, Mister. I'd go out an' browse with th' wild bunch 'fore I'd swallow your chuck."

"That's up to you. If you need oats for your horse, Abelson will see that you're supplied."

"Thanks. But Pete's a gentleman, too. He'll nip dead bunch grass an' browse brush an' feel respectable."

The big man by the mantel smiled in a tolerant way. "It's evident that you don't think very much of me."

"You're dead wrong, Mister. I think a lot 'bout you. Th' burden of my thoughts is that you're an ornery, fence-creepin' crook—some habitual an' plumb unredeemable."

Again the two white hands appeared in the opening and applauded silently.

"Now that you've gotten that off your mind," the host smiled. "My advice is to get off this ranch in a hurry."

"Plumb willin'," Bart answered, tilting on his hat. "It's a long way to anywhere, but I reckon I'll make it alive."

"You will if you get going right now," the other said easily. He shrugged his massive shoulders and turned away.

"C'mon, Whiskers," Bart said, striding past the scowling Abelson. "If I

hang aroun' here much longer I'll git peeved a heap an' bite that geezer, an' then I'll die."

WITH ABELSON following closely, the puncher stalked outside. He found Bill holding Pete under the broad eave of the porch. He turned up the collar of his slicker when a slithering sound on the roof told that sandy sleet had displaced the drizzle.

"Get our hosses, Bill," Abelson ordered. "We gotta haze this long-legged ignoramus outa here 'fore he twists th' boss' tail more an' gets hisself massy-creed."

"Here! Gimme them guns! Th' boss says to give 'em back to 'im. I'll do it, when we're ready to tell 'im bye-bye. Now ramble over to th' bunkhouse an' get our slickers, whilst I git this here public nuisance on th' leather."

Bill shambled off after the slickers. With Abelson watching him warily, Bart walked around on the opposite side of Pete and picked up the rein. Catching a cheek-strap, he hooked a foot in stirrup as though about to swing up. Instead of doing so, he squeezed Pete's neck lightly, just forward of his withers.

Immediately the well-trained little mustang dropped to his knees, then rolled sidewise, bumping Abelson sharply with the saddle before falling on his side.

"Lookout," Abelson grunted, regaining his balance with an effort. "What th' hell's th' matter with that cayuse? Got th' blind staggers, or somethin'? Git 'im up, dammit or I'll—Ugh!"

Abelson had dropped the muzzle of the rifle to prod the fallen horse in the ribs with it. Too late, he braced himself as Lyons' wiry body left the ground and hurled over the horse toward him. Before he could swing the rifle up and around, the puncher's knotted fist smacked solidly against his chin.

The gun clattered to the ground. Abelson reeled, braced himself momentarily, then went down in an inert

heap when the puncher put all he had into another smashing right that raked skin from his own knuckles when it found that bearded jaw again.

Bart spoke, quietly to Pete, who scrambled to his feet, obediently. Buckling on his belt, the puncher swung up. But instead of taking to the bridlepath, he turned the little horse and trotted him around the corner of the house, close to it, where an uncurtained window gave him a view of the dining room.

The master of the place was seated at the head of the table, conversing smilingly with the women. Already angry through and through, Bart grew almost suffocated with rage at the sight. Jerking out a gun, he lined it on the man who had belittled him so thoroughly. Then the puncher shook his head. "Can't do it, Pete. Just can't convert a heathen like him 'thout givin' 'im a break."

The puncher started to return the gun to its holster. Instead, he jerked out the other, when the master of the place threw back his handsome head and laughed delightedly at something the older woman had said. "Chuckle, you ornery split-faced store-dummy, you," the puncher rasped, disgustedly. "I can't kill you," though I know I order. I kin make you quit laffin' an' feel just a little like I do, though."

The leveled guns blazed a double-roll across the sill drilling the pane into a cloud of flying glass. The pendants on the chandelier clinked, and the majority of them clattered down on the table and floor.

"See you later, Mister—an' try to see you first," Bart bawled through the shattered glass, then whirled Pete and gave him his head. The door of the bunkhouse flew open and a half dozen men poured through it, buckling on their belts as they came.

"C'mon; little hoss, we're goin' somewhere," Bart chortled. "Durned if I don't feel half ways like a man again

now that I've expressed my injured feelin's."

PETE WAS tired, but willing. Responding to his rider's urging, he pounded back to the front of the house. As he circled the porch, the front door banged open and the owner appeared, roaring inquiries to Abelson and cursing luridly. Sighting Lyons, he drew a heavy six-gun from his armpit and sent a stream of lead hissing at the retreating figure. His own gun empty, Bart bent low over the horn and spurred the straining pinto lightly. Wet brush slapping him from either side told that Pete was in the narrow trail. As he passed out of the circle of light cast by the porch lamp, the men racing from the bunkhouse joined in the fusillade. A half minute later, hoofbeats sounding in his rear told that several saddled horses had been at hand, and that the jaded pinto had work to do.

Wrapping the reins around the horn as Pete swung out on the open plateau, Bart reloaded his sixes, and let the little horse have his head. There was nothing else to do, as the plain was shrouded in darkness. He knew that, unless otherwise directed, a saddle horse returns the way he came.

The pinto ran well, but the pursuers gained steadily, as their mounts were fresh. A few of them were close up and had renewed their fire when Pete struck the slope and left the level for the broken ground. Seconds later the little horse slid into the sand of the dry branch only yards ahead of the foremost pursuers. Bart jerked him to the right, rammed him through a fringe of alders and halted him there while the chase swept past. Then he started him on at a walk, riding at random through rock rubble and scattered brush. Now and then when branches overhead whipped him and sprayed him with sleety water, he knew that Pete was avoiding tree trunks.

Meanwhile, the pursuing riders had discovered that they had overrun their

quarry. For a time, he could hear them coursing about, shouting to each other. Once he heard the ranch owner's booming voice roaring out an order to "Stay right after him until you get him!"

"Yeah," the puncher grated, shaking his fist in the direction of the shadow-shrouded hillside, "Until you get me. An' when you do, I'll try to let you know that you got somebody!"

The sounds of the hunt faded gradually. Pete threaded his way through the clutter of trees and rocks, slid into a sandpocket on his haunches, scrambled up on the other side, then slowed his pace, mincing forward stiff-leggedly and snorting suspiciously. "Steady boy," the puncher cautioned, then suddenly slid out of his saddle and dropped the rein.

They had rounded a big granite boulder the far side of which bore a band of light along its fissured base. A glance showed Lyons that a fire was burning between it and another boulder fifty feet beyond it. Squatting by the leaping flames, a long, lean man with a drooping sandy mustache was in the act of dumping ground coffee into a sooty-bellied pot. Nearby, a gaunt, white horse was munching oats from a depression in a flat rock. Roofed by a slant of the boulder, the camper's saddle-gear and bedding lay snug and dry, back of the fire. The camper wore a single-holstered belt, and a long rifle lay within easy reach on his right.

Bart patted Pete's steaming neck reassuringly. "I see oats an' smell hot beef an' taters, Ol' Timer. We git warm an' we eat, regardless."

THE PUNCHER hitched his right holster forward a little and stepped boldly into the circle of light. "Evenin', stranger. We just dropped by to ask ourselves to gobble chuck with you. Not wishin' to keep anything back from you, I'm statin' plumb emphatic that we ain't waitin' for an invitation, an' ain't 'spectin' any, an' ain't needin' any. Do I make myself understood?"

"Plumb lucid," the camper answered, without turning his shaggy head. "If you wanta wash, they's rainwater in a holler spot in that rock back of you. You'll find a bottle of forty-rod nose paint in that bedroll. Don't drink all of it. They's a shirt-tailful of oats in a sack underneath my saddle. Don't take all of 'em.

"While I'm wranglin' this chuck, you might hustle a little heavy wood for a after-supper fire, if you ain't too much fagged out. Don't fetch cedar, though. It smells nice, but th' smell carries too cussed far—might bring in more company."

"Well now, that's right friendly-like," Lyons enthused, stumping toward the fire. "Just to insure that ever'thing's gonna be plumb congenial, though, maybe I better assemble all our hardware an' keep a eye on it to keep anybody from comin' along an' steahin' it."

Bart lifted the other man's sixgun out of its holster and picked up the rifle. Without looking at his visitor, the camper finished bedding the coffeepot down, then slapped a big round of beef into a fryingpan and salted and pepperized it judiciously as it commenced to sizzle. Facing him now, Bart saw that he had wisely wrinkled eyes set under faded brown brows, and that his face and hands were adorned with massed freckles that were the largest and deepest colored the puncher ever had seen. His hickory shirt and denim overalls were faded and patched, but reasonably clean.

"Th' name's Lyons—Bart Lyons," the puncher announced politely, then waited.

"Mine's Kinney—Esau Kinney," the other said. He turned his eyes on Bart for the first time, and the puncher noted that a glint of merriment showed in them as he went on soberly: "I don't use my full handle much though. It's a funny thing that, everywhere I go people gits to callin' me Speck. I ain't got no i'dee what makes 'em do it."

"It shore is funny, but I got a strange inclination to call yuh that myself," Bart grinned. "Awright, Speck, I believe yuh're a good feller, but I'm keepin' you on probation for a spell yet. Meanwhile, though, I'm follerin' your orders, implicit."

Bart wrapped the rifle and sixgun in Speck's bedroll and tied a thong around it. Then he took a pull at the bottle, fed Pete sparingly, stacked his own dunnage in the dry, and washed. He was making short trips carrying in wood when Speck called him to the "table." Bart dropped the small log he was carrying and made for the fire on the run. "Didn't want to carry a handi-cap when I made this rush," he grinned as Speck set a big pan of steak on a flat rock by the fire and ranged the coffeepot alongside. As he sat down, the puncher smacked his lips appreciatively. "Yum-yum! Coffee with a good healthy color! Taters that is brown as my first gal's eyes! An' real hones'-to-Gawd bakin' powder biskits!

"Watch me forget my manners."

Speck loaded his tin plate and commenced munching busily. Bart took coffee, potatoes and bread, then transferred a piece of steak from the pan to his plate. Bending over, he inspected it closely, then turned it and looked at the other side.

"What's th' matter—ashes on it, or somethin'?" Speck asked, looking worried.

"Nope. I was lookin' for th' bill of sale." The puncher eyed the other man closely from beneath his hatbrim, watching for signs of guilt.

But Speck only picked up his cup and strained coffee noisily through his drooping mustaches, then renewed his hacking at his steak.

BART FOLLOWED his host's example, but didn't drop the subject. "Never ate rustled beef in my life that I know of, but I'd eat anything, right now. It's your meat though, ain't it?"

"Uh-huh."

"Bully! How many cows do you own?"

"Don't own none—ain't owned none for four-five years."

"But you said it was your meat."

"It is. Don't you see me chawin' it?"

"Oh, I see—rustled it, eh?"

Speck looked pained. "Naw—promoted it. You shore do use rough lang-widge."

Bart remembered the chase and the shots he had heard and decided that the less he knew about the pedigree of that beef the better off he might be. He ate it though and enjoyed it thoroughly.

After supper, Bart washed dishes while Speck wiped. Then, after both had taken another pull at Speck's bottle, the puncher rolled and lighted a cigaret and went after the log he had dropped. As he went along the base of the boulder he passed the rock where Pete was licking up the last of his oats. The puncher stopped to pet the little bronc's neck affectionately. "Pore little feller. It's gonna be kinda rough browsin' with this dern wet sleet a fall-in'. Sorry, Ol' Timer, but it's th' best we kin do, so—"

When Pete snorted and drew back, big-eyed, the puncher whirled and ducked. Something hard and heavy glanced off his head and landed on his shoulder with near-paralyzing force. As he strained to regain his balance, he heard a rush of feet. A snarled oath back by the fire told him that Speck was being assailed also.

Bart felt himself being bear hugged from behind, while a bearded jaw rasped against his cheek. Squirming like a catamount, he recognized Abelson's scowling countenance and railed all his strength to throw him off.

If Abelson was made of iron, Lyons was made of steel. Stamping, groaning with the effort they put forth, the two pried at each other's arms as they revolved slowly toward the fire. And gradually the muscular puncher commenced getting the upper hand. His left arm free, he hooked it around

Abelson's hairy neck and writhed and jerked till the other relaxed his suffocating hold. Twisting to face him, Bart jabbed his left at the eyes, then pistoned his right twice into that heaving chest.

Abelson reeled back, recovered, came boring in, his arms thrashing wildly. Bart fainted, side-stepped, then brought his arm around in a sickle-like sweep. For the second time that night, Abelson went down. Panting, the puncher turned toward the fire, only to be bowled off his feet and fairly smothered under the bodies of three or four fresh adversaries.

Twice the stubborn puncher won to his hands and knees and finally almost to his feet. Then the crumbling old boulder seemed to fall on him, thudding against his skull with all its awful weight. An excruciating pain flashed through his brain to be relayed from there to every member of his body. The brilliant lights that had been flashing before his eyes winked out one by one and the pain left him. As on a downy couch he rested, unworried and aware of no hurt.

- 2 -



BART LYONS awoke in a dim, unreal world that seemed shrouded in dark, unfriendly mists. Someone afar off was talking, but Bart couldn't make the words register properly. He knew that he was lying on a pallet of some sort and that there was a roof over him and walls around him. He started to open his eyes, but found that the effort was too great.

His mouth was parched. His breathing was heavy and jerky. He was convinced that the upper half of his skull was gone and that someone was prod-

ding the lower part of it with a red-hot iron.

The puncher lay there for a time struggling to bring his scattered senses into harmonious action. After a while, the voice sounded nearer: "Hell of a gash... Roll 'im over a little... 'Bout finished, now."

Bart's nostrils commenced to function detecting mingled odors of antiseptics, whiskey and fried onions. His ears picked up footsteps on a hard floor; the light rattle of tinware and, finally, someone's heavy breathing in his very face. He made another effort, and, this time succeeded in opening his eyes. He discovered that a bespectacled man with a round, Scotch face was bending over him fussing about his head. The man smiled in a friendly fashion but shook his head reprovingly when Bart sought to rise. "Lie still, Son, till you get your bearings.... Easy now, while I finish plastering you up.... I'm Dr. Kuhn."

Relaxing, Bart took stock of his surroundings and found that he was in a narrow, gloomy room and that crossed bars separated it from a sort of corridor with little windows set high in its stone wall. At the head of his bunk another set of bars formed a partition between it and a second cell. Standing in the corridor, a tall, stubby-mustached man with a star on his vest smoked a corncob pipe and watched idly as Doc finished working on the back of Lyons' head. "Got 'im all spliced?" he asked in a high, nasal voice as Doc straightened and commenced wiping instruments and packing them in a leather bag.

"Reasonably so," Doc answered, conservatively. "He's got a beautiful gash on top of his head... Nine stitches... Possible skull fracture... Watch it... Other wound lower down not so bad... Painful though... Nerve center, you know... Complications, maybe."

His tools packed, Doc snapped the grip shut and went out. The man with

the star started to lock the cell door, then changed his mind and stepped inside. "How you feelin', feller?" he asked, in a voice that was neither friendly nor unfriendly.

"Little wobbly," Bart admitted. "What happened to me, anyway?"

"Got whanged on th' head a coupla times an' thrown in jail," the officer told him. "Anything you want you better ast for it now. I'm leavin' in a little bit."

"You might bring me a coupla buckets of ice water. First though, tell me what I'm in for."

"In for plenty—but we'll talk that over when th' distric' 'torney gits here. Be here this afternoon, maybe."

"I'll send that there water in by Tom Worden, my head deputy. Gotta be goin', now. I'm Jim Hannon, sheriff here."

"Sheriff where?" Bart asked, still a little befuddled.

"Sand Creek—best damn cowtown in Dakoty," Hannon spoke up. loyally, then went out, locking the cell door behind him. After he had stumped down the corridor, Bart heard him unlock and relock another door. Then he clumped off along a board walk and silence settled over the gloomy jail.

AFTER A little time, a short, bald man with a hooked nose and pale eyes appeared with a pitcher of ice water and a glass. After giving Bart a drink, he started to leave, then appeared to change his mind. "Jim says you might need a little waitin' on, feller," he said, then added a little doubtfully: "I ain't no day nurse. Reckon they couldn't be no harm in turnin' y'ur pardner in with yuh so's he kin kinda ride herd on yuh."

"Comin' up prompt," another voice sounded near Bart's head.

Twisting gingerly around, the puncher saw a homely freckled face pressed against the bars of the partition. "Cheer up, cowboy," Speck grinned. "Mis'ry loves comp'ny, you

know. We're both in for plenty mis'ry, but we got each other for comp'ny. Unlock this gate, Tom, so's I kin team up with 'im."

"Plumb 'ginst th' rules, but I'll do 'er this one time," the deputy agreed. "No funny bizness, though." He unlocked both doors, then stepped aside, sixgun in hand, keeping his pale eyes fixed on his prisoners while Speck joined Lyons. "Fetch yuh two lobos, some chuck after a bit," he promised gruffly, then locked the cell and departed.

"Grouchy hombre, Tom is," Speck remarked, seating himself on the foot of Bart's bunk and commencing to build a smoke. "Hannon's a good feller, though, in a way—but he don't weigh a hull lot. Fact is, he don't never have a thought of his own. Does just what Fox tells 'em, most usual. F'r instance he made a deputy outa Tom 'cause Fox told 'im to."

Onct in a while, though, Hannon gits kinda balky, when Fox wants to go too far. Take las' night f'rinstance. It was some luck far us that Hannon ketched us, 'stead of Fox. Fox would have hung us to th' limb of th' first tree if Hannon hadn't horned in."

"Who's Fox?"

"Th' dude galoot at th' big house that fanned your tail out of there an' into my camp."

"How'd Hannon happen to horn in?"

"He didn't."

"But you jus' said—"

"Well, in a way he did. Hannon an' a bunch was out scratchin' aroun' after some hide thieves that slid over that way after doin' a job east of town. Hannon's posse wasn't after us, but they run smack-dab into our camp just as Fox an' his bunch got us spotted down. If Hannon hadn't stood pat, Fox would have stretched our necks like rubber bands."

"Incidental, an' whilst I think of it, I'll be leavin' out of here some time t'day or t'morrow. If you get out, la-

ter, hit back to that camp an' you'll find me thereabouts. That'll be one place they won't be lookin' to find us."

"How do you expect to bust fence any quicker'n I do?"

"I don't."

"But you said—"

"What I mean is that I'll walk out in daylight, free an' unhindered. If you get out a-tall, you'll be lucky, an' it'll be a night job at that."

"But it was you who promoted that beef."

"Yeah, but it was you who shot up Fox's house. If you'd heared 'im hol-ler 'bout that when he comes rammin' into our camp las' night, you'd know what I mean. Anyway, you chaw that beef. Hannon an' Fox both knows that."

"Well, lace me a smoke, then keep a talkin'," Bart requested, unable to understand Speck, but feeling somehow, that he knew what he was talking about.

Speck made and lighted a cigaret for his cellmate, then braced him into a more comfortable position with some blankets and gossiped on: "As I was sayin', Hannon's a good feller. Needn't worry 'bout him gettin' snorky."

"How long's he been sheriff?"

"He ain't."

"But he said he was. What'd he wanta lie for?"

"He didn't lie."

"But if he ain't sheriff an' says he is—"

Bart sighed heavily and settled back on his blankets. "Keep makin' words an' spittin' 'em out. Mebbe I can line 'em up an' make 'em make sense, now that my head's commencin' to work right."

"In a way, Hannon's sheriff; in a way, he ain't," the old plainsman elucidated, after smoking thoughtfully for a while. "He ain't never been 'lected since the sheriff was killed, five year ago."

"You see, Fox owns th' board of supervisors, body an' britches. They

'pointed Hannon 'cause Fox told 'em to. They ain't been no 'lection since—'cause Fox don't want none."

"But th' other fellers—ranchers an' town folks. How come they don't—"

"They don't get ringy none. You see, Fox pays Hannon outa his own pocket, an' that's a object. It's a dinky little county, with no big spreads in it. Th' little ranchers hates to dig up taxes, an' are glad to let Fox pay off. Also, Hannon don't do nobody any harm. Right now though, they's some talk of a 'lection, Hannon's some uneasy; people have commenced to talk. They call that place out there th' Fox's den."

"But what makes Fox want to own a sheriff?"

Speck looked thoughtfully at the grimy ceiling for a time, then rose to take a turn about the narrow room. Finally he returned to look his fellow prisoner over critically. "Shore you're head's capable of corrallin' some big, hard facts, Son?"

"Yeh."

"Awright. We better git some coffee first, though. It's a long story I gotta tell you before you'll understand why Fox needs a hand-made sheriff."

Speck caught up a tin wash basin from a shelf by the head of the bunk and commenced beating against the bars with it. Tom Worden came scowling in almost at once, and left again with an order for bacon and potatoes for Speck, soup and crackers for Bart, and coffee for both of them.

With the deputy looking on, they breakfasted almost in silence. After he had gathered up the clutter of empty dishes and gone, the two lighted fresh smokes and renewed their confab.

"**H**ARRY STANLEY done th' sheriffin' for this county, five years ago," Speck related. "He was a nice kid. Everybody said so. And he was 'lected, all fair an' reg'lur."

"Stanley lived in a bachelor shack almost on th' spot where Fox's man-

sion stands now. He made a nice little hoss spread there, and was comin' right on financially. He also tinkered with prospectin' kinda as a side line. Staked a coupla ol' timers an' let 'em mess aroun' that dry branch you crossed when you went up to Fox's place.

"Then, one fall, Fox showed up out there. Trout fishin' brung 'em, so he said. Him an' Stanley got thick as boardin' house bugs. Next thing anybody knowed somebody drygulched Stanley—Blowed his head almost off with a shot gun, 'thout givin' 'im no break a-tall.

"After a bit, Fox showed up here in town with a will bearin' Stanley's signature an' leavin' everything to Fox. It looked all reg'lar an' it stuck. Them two prospectors ain't been seen since.

"Right soon Fox built that big house, an' he lives in it like a king. He's boss of th' range—no mistake 'bout that. 'Nother thing 'bout Fox that it'll pay you to remember is, he's greased previousness with a sixgun, an' he'll mix powdersmoke with anybody."

"What's he doin' out there—not ranchin' much; a man with half an eye can see that," Bart remarked.

Speck snapped away a butt and commenced building a fresh one. "Fox ain't doin' anythin' out there—leastwise no ranchin' that would pay salt bills for his help. Fact is, as I've discovered in th' last five weeks, Fox is a city slicker, usin' that place as a hideout when th' Chicago police is 'bout to throw a loop on 'im. Also, he lets other highup city slickers hide out. That's th' kinda guests he entertains with them split-tail dinners, yuh know."

Bart was surprised to find himself able to rise, spurred on by a sudden excitement. "Not all of 'em," he declared, fiercely, swinging his feet to the floor and heaving his body erect as a vision of blonde, violet-eyed loveliness appeared before his eyes.

"Keep your pants on, Son," Speck

advised. "I know what you mean. I seen that gal t'other day, an' she shore is one high-bred looker. But she's there, an' she's stayin' there. That puts th' earmark on 'er."

"Not for me it don't," Bart said, hotly, then told how she had clapped her hands when he had defied Fox.

"That bogs me down, an' I dunno what to think," Speck admitted. He looked thoughtful for a time, then rose to pace restlessly back and forth across the cell.

"What's eatin' y'ur gizzard?" Lyons asked. "What do you have to do with Fox, anyway?"

"Jus' this," Speck whirled to answer. "That kid sheriff, Stanley, was my *youngest brother*."

Bart was puzzled again. "But yuh said y'ur name was Kinney. If it's Stanley, how come you—"

"It ain't."

"Then what makes you say—"

"I don't—'cept when I'm talkin' to you privately. Don't anybody here know me as Stanley. I was livin' in Okleehoomy, an' I come out here to find out who killed my brother. I never let anybody know who I was. So I'm jus' Speck Kinney, understan'."

"An' you think Fox—"

"Yeh. He killed Harry or had him killed, shore as shootin' is shootin'. An' he forged that will. Next thing's to prove it.

"Here I am in th' calaboose with 'bout a dollar an' six bits to my name—if it didn't slip out of my pockets when that bunch jumped me, las' night. Fox ain't in jail, an' he's plenty rich, an' he owns a sheriff an' a judge ur two, an' a distric' 'torney. But, I gotta get 'im, Son! I jus' gotta!"

"Pretty hard to git a loop on a idea," Bart submitted, propping himself on one elbow on the bunk, and commencing to lace himself a cigaret. He was growing stronger every minute, and his head had ceased to hurt so badly. "More especial as he's got us close-penned here."

"Like I told you, I'll get out. But you?"

"Huh! You ain't got no more chanct to break fence right now than a yearlin' slick-ear in a blizzard. They'll—"

Speck broke off suddenly and his hairy, freckled ears appeared to fan toward the door. "Somebody's comin'. Sounds like a bunch of 'em. Gonna examine our minds, maybe."

He bent over the bunk, his freckled face serious, and dropped his voice to a hoarse whisper: "Listen, Son, you don't know me much an' I don't know you much. But I gotta hunch we can work neck-roped t'gether. I want you t' back my play, no matter if what I say sounds loco. Do it?"

"Shore will. Th' whole thing's loco, for that matter. I can't lose my teamin' up with you."

"Bully. Then— S-s-s-h! They're comin' in."

"You're plumb limber, see? Still plenty sick an' weak an' down-hearted. Jus' lay low an' listen to a master tell lies. Remember, though, you're t' yes th' hell outa ev'ry damn lie I tell."

THE OUTER lock grated, Hannon came in, followed by Tom. Behind the two officers strutted a pompous little man in a shabby Prince Albert. His shirt was not entirely white, and his black string tie was frayed at the ends. He carried a sheaf of blank paper and a pen and ink, which he deposited on a table in the corridor. When he turned toward the cells, Bart saw that he was deeply wrinkled. He looked the prisoners over for a time, then drew a chair to the table and sat down, saying importantly to Hannon: "Bring them out, one at a time, Sheriff."

"Mebbe you better say one a day," Hannon remarked jocularly, as Tom unlocked the cell. "That geezer on th' bunk don't 'pear able to shuck aroun' much."

"You other feller, ramble out here."

Speck obeyed, while Lyons lay on his back with his eyes partly closed,

pretending not to be much interested.

"I am James B. Price, district attorney here," the man at the table announced importantly when Speck shambled over to drop into a chair opposite him. Fulton dipped his pen, then held it suspended as he went on, impressively. "Sheriff Hannon charges you with cattle theft upon complaint of one Raymond Fox. It is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you." The pen dropped nearer to the paper. "Are you guilty or not guilty?"

Speck appeared to give the question deep thought. "That depends," he said cautiously, after a time.

Price looked puzzled. "Depends on what?"

"On what th' ev'dence against me is. If you have got plenty ev'dence, I'm guilty; if you haven't, I ain't."

"Nonsense," Price snapped. "You may as well come clean. You two were eating fresh beef just before you were caught, and the remainder of the carcass was in your camp. Are you telling me that you owned that beef?"

"Yeah."

"Wha-a-t? You mean to sit there and say that the steer or cow belonged to you?"

"No."

Price jerked to his feet and pounded on the table. "Trifling with me, eh?"

"Now I'll give you just one more chance to confess, and, stand a chance to come off lightly. Answer my questions, 'yes' or 'no'."

"Which one of 'em?"

Price's face purpled. "Either of them—both of them," he roared.

"Wal, I didn't own cow nor steer, but I did own that beef—in a way."

Price mauled the table again. "In just what way?"

"Wal, I was eatin' it, wasn't I?"

The attorney glared at his wooden-faced prisoner for a moment, then controlled himself and shifted his line of questioning. "Where did you put the hide when you butchered that beef?"

"Yuh mean they ain't found it?" Speck asked, brightening preceptibly.

"No, it hasn't been found yet," Fulton admitted, commencing to write. "That's a small matter, though. You admit that you had the hide and hid it."

"Never admitted anythin'," Speck objected. "Comin' t' think of it, I believe that steer was th' skinless kind."

Price leaped to his feet and swung a hand to smack Specks furrowed cheek resoundingly. "Think you'll trifle with me, eh? Think you'll sit there and defy the law on the theory that without the branded hide, we'll be unable to prove Fox's ownership!"

He drew back his hand again, "Now answer me, you damned thief, or I'll—"

"Just a second, J.B.," Hannon interjected, stepping to the table. "I don't like to call your hand, but I'm dead set ag'in' maulin' a prisoner. If he wants to talk of 'is own free will, let 'im; if he don't—"

"Oh, very well," Price surrendered. "If you're getting squeamish, I suppose he'd repudiate his confession if he made one, so it would be worthless in court." Then sneeringly. "It must be you're taking this talk of an election seriously. Getting a little weak-kneed, eh?"

"Call it that if you want to," Hannon said, commencing to look nettled. "Lecture or no 'lection, nobody's going to beat up my prisoners. Ever'body gits a square break in this jail."

Price waved a hand hopelessly. "Well, go ahead and give that stubborn jackass a fair break. Maybe you can get him to talk."

"Why, of course he can; he's a white hombre," Speck spoke up, grinning amiably at the sheriff. "What is it you want to ask me, Mister? My life's a open book—whole library, I might say."

"Well then, what about that hide?" Hannon asked, as one not expecting to be answered.

Speck's genial smile broadened. "Tell you what I'll do, I'll tell you where that

hide is if you'll agree to fetch it in here 'thout lettin' any other geezer lay eyes on it. Is that a bet?"

"She is," Hannon answered, looking puzzled. "If you go an idea like that—for some reason I can't understand—tell me where to look, an' I'll go-get 'er."

"Wal, she's up on top of that big boulder—th' one where we had our fire."

"Now go get 'er, an' have this Price gazabo here when you fetch 'er in an' spread 'er out right on this floor."

HANNON left immediately, Price going out with him. Wurden returned Speck to his own cell, then seated himself at the table and commenced playing solitaire with a dog-eared pack of cards. After a time, he tilted his chair against the wall and commenced snoring lustily. Shortly afterward, Speck began making similar sounds, and Bart drowsed also. Two hours later, he came wide awake when Hannon clumped in, followed by Price.

"Hey, beef-eater," the sheriff bawled into Speck's cell as Tom unlocked the door. "Ramble out here an' see th' evyence!"

"What brand is it?" Price asked, interestedly as Speck came out, rubbing his eyes and yawning sleepily.

Instead of answering, the sheriff grinned dryly and commenced unrolling a fresh hide he had carried under his arm. Speck remained aloof, but Tom Worden and Price bent over and watched the skin unroll, inch by inch.

It was the hide of brockle-faced dun cow brute. It had been removed in a workmanlike manner.

And it was without a brand of any kind.

Tom Worden straightened with a grunt of surprise. The sheriff widened his grin a little. Price puffed up like a pink lizard and exploded with a loud bang: "Maverick, by Gad!" He whirled on Speck so savagely that Hannon took a step to get between them. "Why in

hell; didn't you tell us you shot unbranded beef?"

"'Cause you didn't ask me," Speck told him blandly. "You asked me if it was my beef, an' I said 'Yes', an' you asked me if I owned any cow or steer an' I said 'no'. Them was th' facts. That critter was anybody's till I made beef of 'im; then th' beef was mine."

"I reckon when we show that hide to th' jury—"

"Jury, the devil," Price sputtered, jamming the cork into his ink bottle and commencing to gather up his papers. "There'll be no trial, of course. Turn him loose, Hannon. We can't hold him any longer."

"Bring out that other rascal."

"He ain't able. Mebbe you better talk to him where he lies," Hannon suggested. "First, though, let's git rid of this long-talkin' dew-drinker. Open the outside door, Tom."

Worden obeyed most willingly, but Speck seated himself comfortably at the table and looked at the sheriff speculatively. "Mebbe you better have my hosses an' guns brung aroun' front first. I reckon they're here somewhere."

"Guns is in th' office, an' hosses is over at th' feedlot. Tell which is yours an' Tom'll go-git 'em."

Bart felt his eyes bulge when Speck said, blandly. "All th' hosses an' all th' guns is mine. I broke that cowboy playin' seven-up an' won everything he had, includin' a first mortgage on his underwear an' boots."

Hannon turned toward Lyons' cell. "That right, puncher?"

"Yes," Bart answered, wondering mightily inwardly, but remembering his promise to back what Speck said.

"Awright," Hannon said. "Git th' hosses, Tom. I'll fetch th' guns. C'mon, feller. Yuh kin wait outside as well's in here."

Instead of obeying, Speck heaved his long legs to the table-top and leaned back comfortably to look ruminatingly at the ceiling. "You geezers fetched me

here, an' I'm commencin' to like th' place," he announced. "Also, I'm wonderin' jus' how to c'mence my damage suit."

"Damage suit?" Hannon repeated, a little uneasily.

"Yeah. False arrest and imprisonment, you know. Seems like I've heard that th' Dakoty law is some strong 'long them lines. Course, I'd kinda hate to sue you bein's you got a 'lection comin' on, an' a thing of that kind might tell ag'in' you. Still an' yet—"

"Now, now," Hannon broke in, placatingly. "I only done my duty as I seen it, so—"

"Well, then, mebbe I won't be too hard on you," Speck decided. "Jus' bring me my hosses an' guns an' be shore my pack mule's got such canned goods on 'im as he had when you grabbed 'im, an' I'll—"

"Pake mule an' canned goods?" Hannon yelped. "What th' hell you talkin' 'bout? You never had no pack mule, nur—"

"Well, if you've up an' lost that mule on me, reckon I'll hafta sue you, after all—not for th' mule, but fur th' false arrest, an'—"

"Thunder an' lightnin'," Hannon cut in. "Git im a mule outa my bunch, Tom, an' strap plenty of canned goods on it! I reckon he's got my tail in a crack on that false arrest stuff."

"I think you're acting wisely," Price offered, judiciously, appearing to enjoy the sheriff's discomfiture. "I'm really afraid he could make a very good damage case against you."

"Listen to that now," Speck applauded admiringly. "Real legal advice, plumb free gratis, for nothin' an' without cost. That reminds me, I near forgot that hundred dollars I give you to keep in your safe for me till I got out."

Price's smile departed, and his cheeks worked nervously. "Hundred dollars? You say you gave me a hundred dollars to keep for you until—"

"Oh, I see... Hum-m... perplexing situation.... Of course, it's a

fact that I did slap you.... Before witnesses, too.... I admit that I did wrong, but—"

"Damage suits is damage suits," Speck remarked, idly. "I'm shore admirin' that advice you give Hannon a bit ago."

Price glared at the unperturbed old plainsman for a time, then jerked out a billfold and dealt out ten tens which he slapped on the table.

Speck tucked the money carelessly into his shirt pocket and settled back in his chair again. "C'mon," Hannon prompted, nervously. "I want to get you out of here 'fore you ask for a deed to th' courthouse—an' get it, probably."

"Oh, awright," Speck agreed, rising with seeming reluctance. "If you geezers really don't want me here, reckon I won't impose my comp'ny on account of th' measly discourtesy you're showin' a guest of th' city, I ain't gonna stop here no more when I come to town."

"Thank Gawd," Hannon said fervently. "An' now, step along a little, won't you? I hear Tom comin' with them hosses."

- 3 -



BART LYONS lay in the squalid old jail, listening to the sounds from without. He could imagine Speck grinning as he took his departure, with Price glowering after him, and good-natured Hannon grinning whimsically over his own defeat. Once, the unmistakable sounds of some sort of altercation were wafted in through the high, barred windows. Then Speck's slow drawl: "So long, fellers. Remember, I'm puttin' up at th' hotel, nex' time I come in."

Somebody laughed; somebody swore

luridly. Footsteps approached and the outer door swung. Lying on his back, with his arm across his face, Bart peered beneath his sleeve and saw Hannon enter, then Price then Worden. Bart started and half rose when Tom Worden stepped aside to make room for Fox, who came frowning in, talking as he came: "You're acting like a baby, Hannon. I just can't imagine what made you turn that old brushpopper loose without consulting me."

Fox was nattily dressed in silk cord breeches and tweed coat. With a derby hat set rakishly on one side of his sleek head, and swinging a riding crop jauntily, he would have passed easily as the master of some mossy English manor. But his handsome face was red with anger and his voice was harsh as he continued to berate the sheriff: "I made the complaint against that prairie vagrant. You should have at least consulted me before letting him go."

"Nothin' against him that I could see," Hannon defended as Tom locked the door and Price reseated himself at the table and spread his writing materials out again. "He didn't do nothin' but shoot a maverick. Th' law—"

"Law, hell! We're th' law," Fox snapped. "It seems that I never shall be able to pound that into your stupid head." He turned to peer into Lyons' cell. "Well, anyway, here's one that won't get sun tanned for a while."

"Get this, now Hannon—you too, Price. I'm charging this man with attempted murder. At that if I hadn't been called to town to attend the meeting of the board of supervisors, he'd have been turned loose, too, though he fired at me a dozen times."

That was too much for Bart. Rising to a sitting posture, he answered, hotly. "Shot at you, eh? Hell, man, do you think I'm plumb mole-eyed? Emptied two sixes at yuh an' hit them glass dinguses on th' lamp ev'ry pop! You mus' think I never learnt to shoot."

"Attempted murder," Fox repeated,

ignoring the irate puncher to address the sheriff. "See what he has to say for himself, Price."

"Bring him out," the district attorney ordered. Worden fumbled out his cell key, but stopped to look questioningly at the sheriff when someone knocked imperatively on the outer door.

The sheriff nodded, and Worden opened the door. Dr. Kuhn came in. Seeing him, Bart relaxed on the bunk, stretching his long limbs limply.

Doc nodded right and left, then stepped to the cell door. After Tom had unlocked it, Doc looked at the sheriff then at the attorney. "You weren't thinking of questioning that cowboy, were you?"

"Yeh," Hannon answered. "Pears like he's braced up some satisfactory, so—"

"I'll decide that if you please." Doc stepped inside and set his bag on the bunk. After taking the puncher's temperature and examining his bandages, he stepped out again, shaking his head. "As Jim Hannon found, he's doing very well; but he has two severe scalp contusions and there still is a chance for other complications. As physician, I positively forbid you to annoy him with questions."

Fox threw back his handsome head and laughed scornfully. "Pretty rich, I'd say. First the sheriff turns one criminal loose, then a little cowtown doctor tells what we shall do and what we shall not. Go ahead, Price."

"Very well," Doc acquiesced, starting for the door. After Tom had opened it for him, he turned to say: "Remember, though, Hannon, I'm holding you responsible. At best, it's downright cruelty to worry a poor devil in his condition. If he develops a fever, it will be plain murder."

"We'll risk it," Fox sneered, as the door closed behind the surgeon.

But Hannon thought otherwise. "What's th' rush, Fox?" he wanted to know. "Seems like you have it in for

him as deep that you don't care if he does cash in."

"I don't—don't care in the least," Fox declared.

"Wal, I do," Hannon announced, stiffly.

"What? You mean you won't let Price—"

"No—not right now." The sheriff's square jaw was thrust out now, and Bart got a new estimate of the man. So did Fox, evidently, for he looked immensely surprised. His smooth face was flaming, but he controlled himself by a visible effort and said suavely. "No use for us to fall out over this, Jim. I have an idea we can settle it so that you will be relieved of all responsibility and I will be amply protected. Just hold everything while I step over to the courthouse for a moment."

FOX STRODE out. When he came back, ten minutes later, he was accompanied by a dried up little man with a wispy goatee, who coughed nervously, and evaded the sheriff's questioning gaze.

"Go ahead, Martain," Fox prompted, smugly. "As chairman of the county board, I believe you have a few words to say to Hannon."

"Needn't say 'em if you're gonna choke over 'em," Hannon said. He jerked his star off his vest and heaved it into a far corner. "Fox has told you worm-spined, herrin-gutted geezers to fire me, an' you done it."

"I'm quittin', prompt. But I'm tellin' you now that they's gonna be a real 'lection in this man's country, an' I'm runnin'—runnin' frum hell to breakfast an' right on through till th' polls close."

"You have my consent, I'm sure," Fox told him smoothly. "Right now, I suggest that you turn your keys over to Tom Worden, who has been appointed to succeed you."

Hannon threw his keys on the floor and stalked out. Worden picked up

the keys, then the sheriff's star, grinning delightedly. Fox snapped his watch open and shut. "Guess we might as well let this investigation go over for a day or two, fellows. I have other business that can't be delayed. I want you to remember what happened to Hannon, Tom. The same for you, Price. From now on, this jail is to be no soft spot with restaurant meals and attending physicians. And, if a prisoner gets out—well, a sheriff gets out, too. Get that Tom?"

Worden grinned crookedly. "Uh-huh. Needn't worry none. That waddy gits bread an' water till court meets nex' month. He'll talk, too, when yuh git ready fur 'im to."

"That sounds more like it," Fox smiled, then looked at his watch again. "Well, got to be going. Suppose we step over to Larry's place and drink luck to the new administration."

AFTER they had gone, Bart lay and did a lot of calm thinking. He knew that he had angered Fox, and that Fox was not the man to forgive an injury easily. Still he could not understand why Fox was so strongly bent on keeping him behind bars.

The puncher did a little more than just worry and wonder. He planned. As a sort of that plan, he got the wash-basin, and banged on the cell door with it till Tom Worden came in scowling and cursing. "Needn't git ringy," Bart cut him off. "I ain't figgerin' on buckin' ag'in' them new rules none." He unbuttoned the flap of a hip pocket and drew out a roll that made the new sheriff's pale little eyes gleam with cupidity. "I'm wantin' a few things, an' I'm payin' cash on th' barrel-head for 'em," Bart told him, replacing the roll and jingling some silver in another pocket.

"Reckon yuh gotta right to buy what yuh please," Wurden agreed. "But I'm tellin' you now that a sheriff ain't paid to lope all over town for a prizner. My

time's valuable. Now what you want?"

"Tell you in a minnit," Bart told him. "First, though, I gotta ease back to that bunk. Feelin' kinda wobbly—plumb limber-legged, yuh know."

Clinging to the bars, Bart worked along the partition and dragged himself into the bunk, seemingly with great effort.

"Nice little show, but it won't git yuh no sympathy," Wurden assured him.

"Don't want none. What I want's cold drinks—beer an' such. I gotta fever, you know, an' my gullet's chapped plumb discommodin'." He rolled to one hip and drew out a dollar which he tossed to the floor. "Take that an' fetch me a cold pint. Have one yourself an' keep th' change. That goes ev'ry two hours till I go broke or tell you diff'rent."

"Fair 'nuff," Worden agreed, eyeing the dollar avidly.

"Awright, all I ask is prompt service. First, though, peel these cussed boots off. Wore 'em two days an' a night an' they're actin' unfriendly."

Grunting something about "no monkeybizness," Tom entered the cell, six-gun in hand, and did as requested. He started to throw the boots to the floor. "Put 'em on th' bunk where I kin keep th' rats off of 'em," Bart requested.

Tom did as he was asked, then picked up the dollar and stood by the bunk for a time, grinning and polishing with his sleeve the new star he had pinned to his vest. "I b'lieve I'm gonna like this here sheriffin'," he declared, smugly, then shambled out.

BART'S plan was complete, but he was executing it slowly, cautiously. He must wait for nightfall, and he must be fully ready, then. Meanwhile, he must work systematically to break down Worden's suspicion.

So, at early sunset when Worden

brought his third bottle, Bart felt that he had made a little progress. For, when Tom had brought the first and second drinks, he had held a gun on his prisoner all the time he was in the cell; now he relaxed his caution to the extent that he left his six in the leather, but kept a hand near it.

The puncher drank only a little part of the beer, then let his head sink back on the bunk. "Gittin' kinda wet up, but keep 'em comin'," he said wearily. "Fetch me a pint of red-eye with th' nex' cold one. Mebbe it'll brace me some."

"That'll cost yuh a extry buck."

"Cheap 'nuff, at that. Needn't fetch it till ten o'clock. Then, if th' spirit moves yuh, we kin have a little night-cap t'gether. I always was a sociable cuss, an' drinkin' alone is a hull lot like kissin' yourself."

After Tom had gone, Bart paced to and fro in his narrow cell for a time, taking an inventory of his physical members. His legs had grown steadier and his head felt almost normal. Satisfied, he returned to his bunk to conserve his strength for the life and death struggle he had decided to make. By way of preparation, he moved the boots nearer to the head of the bunk and placed his hat and coat where he could get his hands on them without delay.

The hours dragged slowly by. Gradually the light faded and the bustling activity about the little town subsided. As the day sounds lessened, click of pool balls could be heard from Larry's place across the street. The dim voice of an unloiled windmill somewhere north of the jail grew in volume. Occasionally a rancher or puncher clattered by on his homeward way, or a merchant stamped along the walk, after closing his place.

Bart had ridden through Sand City on his way up country, and he found that he could remember the lay of the town fairly well, and the angle he must take from the vicinity of the jail in

order to skirt the town and hit the western trail.

The puncher knew well that he was taking a desperate chance. He was going to jump Tom Worden, and he knew Tom was cautious, suspicious, crafty, in a ratlike way. He knew, too, that if he struck and failed, Tom would not hesitate to kill him, knowing that Fox would heartily approve the act.

Lying there in complete darkness, Bart was nervous, chafing under inaction, when every fiber of him was keyed for a fight. Still, when he heard Worden's heavy, measured tread on the walk and a key grated in the lock, he managed to assume a fully relaxed posture on the bunk, and there was a drowsy note in his voice as he greeted his jailer: "'Lo, I see yuh got here."

"Yeh." Bart could hear Worden feeling his way along the wall of the corridor. A match flared and Worden lighted the smoky-globed bracket lamp above the table. He turned the reflector to throw the light fully into the cell, then unlocked the door. When he entered, he had the whiskey bottle in one hand, the beer in the other. Cautious as ever, he stopped a yard from the bunk and set the whiskey on the floor, then uncapped the beer and held it out at arm's length as he stepped nearer. His heart beating like a trip-hammer Bart tried successfully to keep his voice even as he said, "Take a snort of th' red-eye y'urself, while I'm spreadin' myself aroun' this. Hit it as hard as yuh want. When this is gone, Larry's got plenty more."

Rolling to one hip, Bart drank his beer, aware that Tom kept his pale little eyes on him, even as he tilted the whisky bottle up and drank gurglingly. He watched narrowly when Bart finished the drink and extended the bottle—a possible weapon, of course. He watched as narrowly when his prisoner accepted the whiskey bottle.

"Thought yuh was honin' fur red-eye," Worden commented, when Bart recorked the bottle and tucked it under

his soiled pillow, after taking only a modest nip.

"Nuff fur right now," Bart said, thrilling from head to foot when he noted that Tom's suspicions had been allayed by the fact that both bottles were now out of Bart's handy reach.

The big moment was at hand. "Pay day," Bart announced in a voice that trembled slightly, despite his desperate effort to keep it steady. Rolling to his right side to bring his face to the wall, he reached into his left-hand pocket and brought out two dollars.

He rolled back. Worden reached for the money. Bart passed it awkwardly, one of the coins falling to the floor on a line with the edge of the bunk.

"Come to papa," Worden chortled, stooping.

Bart had been groping behind him, getting a grip on the leg of one boot. As Tom's head reappeared on a level with the bunk, the puncher swung savagely.

The heel of the boot thudded home, flattening the crown of Tom's hat and bringing him to his knees, but not knocking him out, as Bart had hoped.

Bellowing with mingled rage and pain, Worden swayed to a stooped position and clawed at his holster. Out of the bunk now, and behind his jailer, Bart raised the boot high and struck two-handedly with all his might.

The drawn gun clattered to the floor, as Worden sprawled, face down. Stooping, Bart caught it up and tossed it on the bunk, then tore his blanket into strips with which he bound and gagged the limp sheriff.

Then the puncher drew on his boots, tucked the gun inside his shirt and caught up his coat and hat. Going into the corridor, he locked the cell door and put the lamp out. Passing through the outer door, he locked it also, then threw both keys onto the flat roof of the building.

"Now for a hoss—anybody's hoss." The puncher looked along the narrow

street. A dozen broncs still were standing before Larry's place. A big white horse was pawing restlessly in front of the bank, a little way beyond. Bart hesitated, a moment, then started for it, uneasy because he must pass the lighted saloon, though on the opposite side of the street.

The puncher knew that Worden was not hurt badly, and would regain his senses shortly; that the gag might slip, allowing him to be heard. Yet the puncher merely loafed along the walk. He was abreast of the saloon when he saw Hannon emerge from it. Bart's heart appeared to skip a beat, then race madly when the former sheriff stopped and stared curiously in his direction.

There was nothing else to do, now. Bart strolled carelessly along, then angled across toward his intended mount. Keeping pace with him now on the opposite side, Hannon slowed, stopping by the horse just as Bart reached it.

The puncher felt inside his shirt and gripped the butt of the six. "Better keep outa this, Hannon," he advised, certain now that he had been recognized. "I'm needin' a cayuse, an' this one looks like a sod-gouger."

"I'm recommendin' 'im," Hannon came back, with a side glance up and down the deserted street. "An' I orter know—he's mine. Jus' turn 'im loose when yuh git inta th' clear. He knows th' way home."

"Me, I thought I was goin' home, myself, but I've changed my mind. I'm goin' back an' take on a few more snifters. In 'bout an hour th' saloon'll close an' I'll be raisin' Billy Hell an' hollerin' fur th' sheriff. Incidentally, will he come?"

"Better go git 'im when yuh really want 'im," Bart advised, dryly.

"Thankin' yuh fer th' tip, I'll pay yuh with another one. Yuh better scallyhoot clean outa th' country 'fore yuh take any long rest."

"Thanks," Bart said, extending a hand which Hannon shook heartily. "Fact is, though, I got a little deal or two to settle 'fore I quit this range."

"An' if I kin help, call on me," Hannon promised, then turned back toward the saloon.

Bart swung up, walking the horse slowly down the dark street and thanking the luck that was bringing a full moon slowly over the hill to eastward. In an hour, he had turned the horse at the edge of the broken country adjacent to the Fox's den; in another he was stumbling toward the dim light of a campfire reflected against the overhanging side of a rugged brown boulder.

"Hullo, Speck, you lop-eared ol' he-elephant"; the puncher called.

"Hullo, y'urself, you spider-legged tarantula"; came back from under the rocky roof back of the fire. "C'mon in an' hug y'ur ol' pappy! I knowed you'd make it somehow, but I didn't 'spect you so soon!"

"I'm tellin' yuh solemn that I left fur here as soon as I could," Bart grinned as he stepped into the little circle of light and Speck came to meet him, grotesque figure in his underwear with his trousers in one hand, the other extended.

"Stir up th' fire whilst I cinch on these britches an' we'll palaver," Speck enthused. "If my suspicions is k'reckt, you're a outlaw, Son. That bein' th' case, I'm a outlaw, too, fur harborin' you. So we'll both do a little wholesale an' retail outlawin', an' not give a damn.

"As a starter, if you're hungry, I got some damn fine beef that's jus' quit wearin' a big diamond on its left hip— which same is Fox's brand."

"But that's stealin'—'scuse me; I mean promotin'." Bart demurred dubiously.

"No it ain't. In war it's pumb fair to forage off th' enemy. An' Son from now on out, this is war, you bet!"

- 4 -



HE TWO friends— now outlaws—ate bacon and flapjacks in the grey dawn of what promised to be a cloudless day. During the meal, Bart told Speck about Fox's visit to town, and the change of sheriffs.

Busily inhaling black coffee with a noise somewhat resembling that of a stalled tractor, Speck abstractedly held the tin cup suspended within inches of his splotched nose. "Can't wrangle that i-dea," he said, thoughtfully. "Worden won't last as sheriff, an' Fox must know it. Seems like Fox is invitin' a rebellion on th' part of th' votin' population, an' he ain't th' man to do that 'thout he's got some big reason."

"Mebbe he jus' got on th' prod an' lost his head," Bart suggested, stretching across the "table" to skid another flapjack onto his tin plate.

"Uh-uh," Speck negatived, decidedly. "Fox gets on th' prod, frequent, but he never loses his head. That long-figgerin' ranny's gonna pull off some-thin' big, an' he's gonna need a sheriff that won't break herd on him, at a pinch. When he picked that ornery Tom Worden he got th' right man, awright."

"Speakin' of Worden," Bart considered, "what are we gonna do if he jumps us some day?"

"Fight hell outa him," Speck answered. "He's only a imitation officer, anyway. This here's a sheriffless county, till after 'lection, so fur's we're concerned. Ain't shy of him none are you, Son?"

"Nope. Just wanted to know th' program An' now what are we going to do first?"

Speck gulped the last of his coffee,

pushed his plate away and stretched back luxuriously to roll a smoke. "I been messin' aroun' here a good bit in th' last few weeks, an' I found out a few things.

"Fox keeps anyways a dozen men—not riders, but lead-squirters. They patrol th' whole place durin' th' day, an' he keeps guards out at night—as you discovered when you oozed up to th' house. But what pears to worry 'em particular is that dry branch over there. They watch it all day—always four-five of 'em, an' they's always some of 'em ridin' up it, or ridin' down it.

"Mebbe I know th' reason an' mebbe I don't. I've scouted it to where a couple other little gulches runs into it, a mile or so over there. I'm figurin' we better take up where I left off an' give all that neighborhood a good scratchin'.

"Yuh know, Son, I feel kinda sneaky-like, askin' you to set into th' game when you ain't got nothin' in th' pot. Me? I'm tryin' to find out what happened to my kid brother an' how come Fox owns everything Harry had.

"But here you are, stickin' your neck out an' askin' to have your head shot off, when you ain't got no reason at all to—"

"Don't worry none," Bart cut in, shoving his own plate back and commencing to get out the makings. "I'm drawin' cards in this game, an' I got a object, awright"

"An' does that there object wear more or less pettycoats?" Speck asked, eyeing his partner shrewdly.

Bart felt his cheeks burn, "Well, Fox made a jail-breakin' outlaw out of me, didn't he? I gotta fight back, don't I?"

"Nope. All you gotta do is to fork that pinto an' ease right along up th' trail.

"You're a plumb onconvincin' liar, Son, but your bizness is your bizness. Offhand, though, an' speakin' plumb general, aidin' females in distress is great in th' storybooks, but leads to head-bumpin's, most usual.

"Lemme give you a hunch from my

own experience. One time, down in Oklahomy, I was walkin' up a road. Our redheaded schoolma'am was jiggin' along ahead of me, an' I noticed that 'er skirt or somethin' was draggin', hobblin' 'er scandalous. Made 'er walk kinda string-halted, yuh know.

"I hollered an' told 'er to tighten 'er back cinch, an' she never spoke to no member of my family afterwards.

"'Nother time, I was walkin' home from a taffy-pullin' with th' preacher's sister, an'—"

"Ain't it about time we got to stirrin' aroun' a little?" Bart cut in. "If we're gonna lop off this Fox's ears, we better be gittin' at it."

"Oh, awright," Speck sighed, resignedly, then snapped the butt of his cigaret into the dying fire and rose. "If you jus' won't lissen to good advice frum a ol' time woman herder go 'head an' git your durn face scratched.

"Whilst I'm wranglin' these dishes, you better git in night wood an' stake them hosses where they'll stay put till we get back. We're gonna scout afoot, today—on our bellies part of th' time, mebbe."

AFTER banking the fire with damp ashes to insure against smoke betraying their hiding-place during the daylight hours, the two set off across the maze of rubble. Both carried rifles, canteens, and bacon sandwiches. Speck wore his boots, but Bart had on moccasins.

They passed the trail near the dry branch, then took to the right bank and followed it to where two other washes—both dry—joined the main one. "We're splittin' here," Speck announced "I'll keep this side an' you cross. Play close to y'ur belly and don't leave no tracks in th' soft footin'. See what you see, an' I'll do th' same. Don't have no run-in with anybody, today, an' meet me at camp, at sundown.

"If you git into a tight, use your brains an' your eyes an' your smoke-sticks. If you're caught this time, you'll

be cold meat in three jerks of a calf's tail."

After Speck had disappeared in the fringe of brush that paralleled the branch, Bart crossed where rock-bottom would take no sign, and kept along the left-hand side. As he proceeded, the land rose and the brush grew more dense, cedar and scrub pine thickening with every yard of his advance. He explored the two minor washes, examining the sandy floor of each closely without finding track of horse or man. The main branch was hoof-cupped heavily, as it had been all the way up from where the trail crossed it.

There was nothing particularly suggestive about that as grazing stock, going to and from water in a rough country often use the level creek floors as thoroughfares.

But when the puncher reached the third lateral channel, and all of the horse tracks turned into it, he grew interested, and intensified his caution. Keeping well back from the bank, but for an occasional approach to inspect it, he worked along its now heavily-timbered side, stopping frequently to look and listen. After going a mile, and negotiating a sharp curve to the left, he was puzzled and temporarily baffled when he peered down into the wash and discovered that its sandy floor was practically barren of sign. A few cow-tracks showed, leading nowhere in particular. No horsetracks were there.

Backtrailing, more cautiously than ever, Bart kept near the bank and watched every inch. Finally, he smoked three ruminative cigarets while digesting the fact that the horse rails had ended where the branch widened and rocky footing on each bank forbade trailing. "Somebody's hell bent on hidin' sign from here on," he mused, as he snapped away the third butt and rose. "'Course th' hard land would keep tracks from showin', but they'd be more or less droppin's from all them hosses that's been up here. Somebody's even gone to th' trouble of sweepin'

'em up an' carryin' 'em away or—

"Wait a second. That ain't it, either. I got 'er, now. This is as far as anybody comes a-hossback. Furthermore, some of them stock is mules.

"Wait till I make me another look-see. 'Pears like I'm trailin' an idea, but I can't get a rope on it."

He worked back a little way, then crossed and examined the far side closely. Then the floor of the wash came in for an inch-by-inch inspection that caused him to smile in a satisfied way when he had finished. "Puzzle's worked," he chuckled as he scrambled out and back into the brush. "That is part of it is. Th' rest'll prove itself, sooner or quicker.

"Wish Speck was here to help figure this thing out. Bein' he ain't, I gotta—"

The puncher took a quick sidestep and pinned his body to the hole of a blasted pine, peering around it into the jumble of alders and sagebrush. Somewhere out there a dried twig had snapped. As he listened, rigid, gravel grated lightly under what he knew must be a bootheel, and a little brown rabbit scurried past him, running low and fast.

Bart worked a gun out and waited. There was nothing else to do. He was in a little horseshoe of the bank, and escape was possible only by crossing it or by passing near whoever was coming. He must either put up a fight or state a hold-up—perhaps both.

That light, grating tread sounded again, and parted brush slithered against passing clothing. Then the peak of a felt hat showed momentarily, dropped below his vision, and reappeared, yards nearer.

The hat remained stationary for a time, one side of the felt brim tilted into view, showing that the skulker was listening—waiting for him to move.

Again the crown of the hat disappeared as its wearer came warily on, so close now that Bart could glimpse a bent, brown-clad figure worming through the thinning green screen, and now less than a rod distant. It swerved

slightly to the left to avoid a stubby box-alder, then bore directly for the pine. When the bent figure was within two yards of him, Bart stepped around the tree, gun at a level. "Straighten up, Mister," he ordered, crisply, "an' th' first thing I wanta see come up is y'ur hands. Reach plenty high, at that, an' be dead shore them hands is empty."

"That's it—er—What th'—Wait a secont till I see—er—"

"Hell! I mean *my goodness!*"

First to appear above the green level were two fringed gauntlets neatly fitted to a pair of small and exquisitely formed hands, below which showed the neatly ironed sleeves of a cord shirt. Next, the hat rose, its flat brim roofing a mass of sun-tinted amber hair. Two deep violet eyes looked steadily into his. The girl he had seen in Fox's house stood before him her oval face pale, her brow creased in vexation.

Bart felt his face flame as his gun-hand dropped instinctively and he stood shuffling his feet awkwardly and attempting to stutter out an apology. "Beg pardon, Miss...Shore do... Didn't mean to crack down on no woman... you see, I—"

"Then you're not one of Fox's men?"

"No, dammit—er—I mean hell no—I don't mean that, either. What I mean is—well, I just ain't."

"But drop them hands, please Miss. Honest, I feel plumb skunky drawin' a gun on a pretty little thing like you."

The blood flooded back into her face and she smiled faintly as she dropped her hands and stepped nearer. "Something of a relief," she said, composedly. "I'm not a particularly nervous person, but I confess that the sudden sight of that pistol—"

SHE CEASED speaking to lean forward and examine him with impolite interest. "But, aren't you the man who was up at the house the other night—the one that sprinkled powdered glass all over our dining table?"

"Yes, Miss, I'm th' feller. Sorry I

lost my head an' scared you. An' now I've gone an' done it again. Seems like I—"

She smiled, and the perfectly adorable dimple that showed on her cheek caused the gaping puncher to tremble from head to toe. "You're forgiven. Anyway, I wasn't a bit frightened the other night. Something told me that I was perfectly safe."

"I confess that, just now, though, I was startled and—well, I shouldn't like to be caught spying on Fox's men."

"Nor me," Bart grinned, parting the brush before her as she emerged and stood a trim, slender figure in a tan corduroy riding skirt and blouse. "Fact is," he apologized again, "when yuh come cat-walkin' through that brush, I thought yuh was somebody that was gettin' set to gun me a little."

"Oh dear no," she laughed. "I never carry a gun. I was watching that ridge on the opposite side, and saw you over there, a little while ago. I came through the brush to get a nearer view, not knowing that you had crossed, meanwhile."

"It is I who should apologize for creeping up on you."

"Not any," Bart disputed vigorously. "Not a mite of harm did, 'cept that I made a—er—fool of myself."

"You got my free permission to jus' keep right on creepin' up on me for th' rest of your life," he added, brazenly.

She laughed lightly again. "Thanks, but I prefer walking erect, under ordinary conditions. Also, I hope you don't think that it's my custom to approach strange men—"

"Which reminds me," Bart cut in. "We are strangers, in a way, *yet*." He took off his hat and bowed profoundly. "The name is Bart Lyons—rovin' puncher from Amarilla, Texas. I'll be twenty-four in April, I'm a democrat. My folks is Methodists. Right now, I'm a beef-rustlin' outlaw, but—"

"Perhaps we needn't make the biography quite so extended," she suggested, setting Bart a-tremble by smiling

again. "In turn though, I'm Margaret Randolph. Won't that be enough?"

"No," Bart told her, decisively. "Ain't a snoop cuss, p'tickler, but I'm hell-bent—I mean dead set—on gettin' a lot better acquainted than jus' knowin' y'ur name."

"No hurry, though. Take plenty time—say ten or fifteen seconts—then tell me how come a girl like you beds down on a place like Fox's."

"I might answer that," she considered, "if you would first answer a question for me—answer it truly and frankly."

"Shoot."

"Well, then, you were going through this country, so you told Fox the other night. Now I find you still here. What caused you to change your mind?"

"Got whanged on th' head an' thrown in jail," Bart evaded, commencing to shuffle his feet uneasily again.

She kept her eyes on his. "But you're out of jail now. What's holding you here?"

"Well, after that tryin' experience, I wanted to kinda mess aroun' a while an' get my arms an' legs stretched."

"And your neck, too? Fox won't hesitate to hang you, if he doesn't shoot you on sight, and you know it."

"You may as well tell me the truth."

Bart tramped up and down in one place and commenced to sweat. "Well, then, if your bound to haze me into a corner, I ain't gonna lie to you—couldn't anyway, if I tried."

"I stayed here, an' I'm stayin' here 'cause I know you don't b'long on this place, an' wouldn't stick here if Fox didn't have you snubbed up some way."

She shook her blonde head soberly. "I was afraid so."

"I'm nothin' to be 'fraid of," Bart assured her, pretending to misunderstand. "'Course I don't wear clothes-pun coats an' have ribbon on the seams of my pants, an'—"

"Nonsense," she chided. "You know

perfectly well what I mean. I can't let you walk straight into a desperate situation on my account, and—"

Bart grinned happily. "Oh, is *that* all? Then s'pose we change th' subject an' you go 'head an' tell me—"

She cast a startled look past him then clutched his sleeve and tugged lightly, at the same time pointing across the branch. "S-h-h! There's someone over there! I think he sees us!"

BART SHOVED the girl back of the pine and fell to his hands and knees peering out through the bushes. Almost instantly he rose. "It's all hunky-dory; that's my pardner."

"He's waving at you," she whispered, excitedly, stooping to send an electric thrill through his body by clutching his sleeve again.

"Stay hid," he cautioned, as he saw old Speck duck back of a boulder, after waving his hand warningly. Hardly had he spoken when Abelson and two other men rode past, stopping fifty yards off, where the jumble of tracks ended. Abelson and the man called Bill dismounted and scrambled up the rocky slope. Abelson carried a kerosene can, and Bill had what appeared to be a basket of lunch. The third man turned back along the branch, leading their horses.

"I know it," Bart muttered, more to himself than to her. "Them tracks in that soft sand shows that them hosses often carries men up here an' goes back unrid. Sometimes they come up light an' go back loaded—especially them mules."

"What for, I dunno. But here comes Speck; mebbe he can help figure it."

Speck crossed and stalked up to where they stood. Dropping the butt of his scarred rifle to the ground, he crossed his gnarled hands over the muzzle and glared reprovingly at Bart. "Been asleep?" he wanted to know. "If I hadn't flagged yuh, yuh'd got ketched, shore as sunrise."

"I was thinkin' of somethin' else," Bart admitted, sheepishly.

"That was plumb evident," Speck growled, with a meaning glance at the girl. "But this ain't no Lovers' Lane. Mebbe it would be better for you to do your sparkin' somewheres where—"

"Pardon me," she interrupted, flushing. "But absolutely no 'sparkin' was being done. However, I think your suggestion is a very good one. I still have a few things to tell Mr. Lyons. Perhaps it would be better to do our talking over there where I left my horse."

She turned and worked her way through the brush, soon taking to a dim cattletail that led to an open glade where a saddled horse greeted her with a low whinney of delight. Bart had followed at her heels, Speck coming along behind, grumbling beneath his breath all the way.

After patting the little black mare's neck caressingly, she drew a toy watch from her shirt pocket and glanced at it. "My! Past nine! I've been gone two hours. I must go in at once, or they'll be out searching for me.

"First, though, I'll tell you men hurriedly what I know." She leaned against the mare's glossy withers, toying abstractedly with a wisp of its mane as she went on: "Fox is a crook, black-guard, murderer—of that I'm convinced."

"We lived at Lincoln. Father died, leaving Mother our home and fifty thousand in securities. Fox met us at a reception, and fascinated Mother, at once. Not that she fell in love with him, but she—well, he seemed rich, he undoubtedly was handsome, and she—"

"Wanted him for you," Bart supplied, when she hesitated.

"Yes, that's it. She fairly threw me at him. Also, she practically forced me to come up here when he began trying to induce her to buy this ranch."

"Th' son-of-a-gun," Speck commented, commencing to look at the girl with less hostility.

"Mother had her bonds forwarded, and is ready to close the deal," she went on. "But I'm convinced that he means to cheat her, and I'm almost certain that he intends to murder her, after getting her money."

From which I deduce that you're kinda suspicious of Fox," Speck said, sitting down cross-legged and commencing to roll a much-desired smoke.

"I have a right to be suspicious," she declared. "I have exceptionally good ears, and have heard the men talk." She looked at the watch again and commenced untying the mare. "I have only time to tell you this much:

"Fox *has* murdered people and caused people to be murdered. He is getting ready to get out of this country as soon as he has made the final 'clean-up'—whatever is meant by that.

"And he is holding someone a prisoner over there beyond that ridge across from where I met you two—has held him there for years.

"Now I must go."

Bart leaped to assist her, but she already had vaulted lightly into saddle. She twitched the rein, and the good little mare surged down the woods trail. A wave of the girl's hand where the timber thickened about her, and she was gone.

BART STOOD gaping at the spot where Margaret had disappeared. "Some girl!" he gulped, admiringly. "Some girl an' then some!"

"Did you-hear-what-she-said?" Speck asked, jerkily. He rose slowly, his face ashen. "Been holdin' a prisoner for years," he muttered, dazedly. "Loaded hosses, unloaded hosses; loaded an' unloaded mules.

"C'mon, Son, le's go to camp. I can almost piece this thing together so it makes sense, an' still I can't quite.

"We gotta give this thing one great big thinkin' over, then spit on our hands an' wade in."

"Keno!" Bart applauded, as they started. "I'll do anything for her."

"Oh, it's 'her,' eh?" Speck grunted as he swung into the path. "Well, at that, Son, I dunno but she's worth it. This much I'll say: She can tell more in less words than any female woman this side of hell."

Keeping to the timber, they worked their way back to camp. When Speck rounded the first big boulder, a little in advance of his partner, he jerked to a stop and held up a hand. Easing up beside him, Bart saw that a man was sitting with his back against their boulder, evidently napping. His big pearl hat was tilted to cover his face, but a star marked SHERIFF glittered on his vest.

"Th' sneakin' polecat," Speck grated, swinging his rifle around.

Bart caught his arm. "Wait! It ain't Wurden; it's Hannon!"

Speck lowered the rifle and they walked toward the sleeper. When Bart shook him by the shoulder, he looked up and drawled sleepily, "'Lo, fellers. I got kind lonesome down there in town, an' come out to pay yuh a visit." He saw Bart eyeing the star questioningly. "It's mine," he explained, grinning. "I got to talkin' to some of th' boys, las' night, an' found out that they was with me. Three outa th' five supervisors weakened when we shook 'em over th' pits of hell an' give 'em their orders. Then, this mornin', I met up with Tom Worden, an' yanked this star off 'im.

"I got it an' I'm sheriff, but I ain't foolin' myself none. When Fox gits th' news, things is gonna happen. I ain't much man-shy, but I ain't ready to lock horns with him. Gotta git th' deadwood on him first.

"As I see it, we orter throw in t'gether. You two wanta git a line on Fox's doin's, an' I gotta crimp 'is tail to hold my job long. He'll chaw my ears off, if I don't chaw his first.

"That there bein' th' case, I thought

I'd come out here an' help you boys git th' hones'-to-Gawd low-down dope on that geezer. It was a piece of luck that I happent to come this way an' found your outfit here. I figgered, you was scoutin'."

"Good figgerin'," Speck applauded, commencing to rake ashes away from the coffeepot he had bedded down in the coals. "We'll have a snack an' a pow-wow. T'night we'll play owl, an' go see what we see when we see it."

"I gotta great-big ring-tailed idea that we'll see a plenty at that, mebbe a little more than we want to."

- 5 -



THE THREE companions left camp at early sunset, but proceeded in a wide circle instead of going directly to the branch where all of their interest was centered. Swinging to northward, they struck the ridge and worked along its crest, Bart in the lead, growing ever more wary as they neared the spot where the telltale hoofprints had turned back. "Keep back, Speck, you're trampin' on my heels," the puncher protested, as they slanted down a little way from the peak of the ridge in order to keep to the cover. "Durned if I ever seen a feller that was plain' for a rukus like you are.

"Hold th' cantankerous ol' cuss here if you can, Hannon, while I go peek aroun' a little."

After seeing Hannon and Speck tuck themselves into a cluster of sagebrush, the puncher left his rifle with them and worked his way toward where he expected to find a trail leading up the incline from the branch.

He exercised every little precaution, sneaking from brush to brush and stopping frequently to listen. He struck the expected trail after a hundred yards,

and ensconced himself in a little cluster of boulders that clung to the hillside.

Immediately the puncher knew that his caution had served him well. For, above him, and not twenty-five yards distant a match cracked and a thin spiral of smoke drifted from below the spreading boughs of a low-growing juniper. "Look out man," he decided. "Hope ol' Speck don't get itchy an' come rammin' along an' get seen."

Uneasy at the thought, the puncher worked his way back to where the others lay. "Follow me, an' travel on y'ur bellies, an' don't let your hearts tick too loud," he warned them. "Stop when I stop, an' don't move till I do, if I don't stir a hoof till mornin'."

AFTER crawling back to his former locaton, even more cautiously than before, Bart motioned the others in beside him. They had just gotten settled, when the guard by the juniper rose, and Bart recognized him as Abelson. He yawned, stretched lazily, then grew suddenly alert, stepping free of the tree to look interestedly toward the branch. The soft padding of hooves sounded down there, and a mumble of voices. Motioning to the others to stick tight, Bart peered out cautiously and saw two unsaddled mules. They stopped at what evidently was their accustomed place and one of them remained with the mules while the other climbed the slope hurriedly. "How's ever'thing?" he asked, when he came up to where Abelson stood.

"Hunkydory, I reckon," Abelson answered. "Th' boys is 'bout done, so far's I kin see."

"They better be," the newcomer stated. "Fox has got his dander up an' is drivin' ever'body hell-bent over at the house. He's dead set on makin' a cleanup t'night, an' don't yuh furgit it."

"He'll be along over here after a bit, an' things had better be movin' plumb slickery."

"Wal, it's y'ur move, right now," Abelson informed him, crustily.

The fellow took the hint and disappeared over the ridge. When he called something ahead of him as he went down the opposite slope, Bart knew that they were close to the end of the trail. He had to turn and fairly wrestle Speck down into his place when the excited old plainsman reared up in plain sight of Abelson, who chanced not to be looking that way. "Play badger, dammit," Bart hissed into Speck's ear.

"Awright," Speck whispered back, chewing nervously on the enormous quid he had packed into his hollow cheek. "I'll lay down an' play dead, right now; but I'm gonna resurrec' myself some vigorous an' plumb tenacious if—"

"Sh-h-h!" Bart shook a warning fist in Speck's freckled face, then rose to hands and knees. He shook his yellow head in surprise when, one after the other, five men appeared from the far side of the ridge, each staggering beneath the weight of a small, but apparently heavy, sack. They stopped on the crest to recover their breath, then went down to the creek, where one of them remained with the mule-tender, the other four retracing their steps. "Hustle some," Abelson prompted as they passed his station. They hastened out of sight over the ridge, and Bart could hear them scrambling down the other side.

Meanwhile, the two men down in the branch had commenced lashing the sacks together in pairs and swinging them across the mules' backs. Soon the four reappeared with fresh burdens, and the work went swiftly on.

Bart watched and wondered mightily. The sacks seemed to be heavy, and he surmised that they must be precious or Fox would not go to so much trouble to secure them. There could not be that much gold in the world; still, what else could it be?

RECRUITING in the timber belt that bordered the drain, the shadows crept up the slope, purpling the

ridges, greying the hillsides, inking the drains and swales. Abelson lighted a lantern and stood holding it as a beacon. Another light bobbed about among the mules like a restless will-o'-the-wisp. "How much more?" Abelson asked, when the carriers plodded past his lantern.

"One sack," one of them answered. "Bill'll fetch it. He's goin' in with us."

"Whew-ee! Believe me, I ain't none sorry this is 'bout over. Ain't been so cussed tired sence—"

The fellow hushed abruptly and went trotting down the path with ludicrous haste when Fox's full, powerful voice sounded from the branch. "You up there! Shut up and get yourself on down here!

"How's everything, Abelson?"

"Fine and dandy. I kin hear Bill a-comin' with th' last load.

"Are we gonna take th' tools out?"

"No. Leave the bedding and food, too. I'll be up there as soon as I get these dumbheads started. Who else is over there?"

"Jake and Lefty."

"All right. You go down there, and the three of you wait for me. On second thought, let Jake come on out, and I'll bring Bill back, when I come. I have a special job for you and him."

Fox turned his attention to the packing. "Special job, eh?" Bill grunted, as he passed Abelson and took to the decline. "Huh! Gimme three guesses 'bout what that job is, an' I'll give two of 'em back to yuh."

"Reckon, yuh're right," Abelson chuckled, then set his lantern beside the path and disappeared over the crest.

Bart heard Speck draw in his breath with a hissing sound and curse cold-bloodedly. "Steady -ol' feller," he cautioned the excited old plainsman. "Keep your shirt on and hang hold of my tail when I start. I'm figgerin' you'll get all th' action you need, 'fore this night gets much older.

"We're goin' over there. Ready, Hannon?"

"Yeh."

"Awright, stick close to Speck. Step light. If I stop you fellers, stay put till I start you ag'in. Don't even whisper. Back any play I make.

"When I say back my play, I mean back it with your rifle an' both sixes. When they're empty, back it with your fists an' your teeth. If I got things doped right, we got a coupla big jobs on hand, an' we may have to fight like a sackful of drunk catamounts.

"I hear Fox an' his bunch leavin' an' we gotta get over there before he comes back. . . . C'mon. I don't know just where we're goin', but I think I know what we're gonna do."

THEY STARTED, Bart swerving to keep away from the lighted lantern. As he was working back toward the path he stopped when bootheels grated ahead, and he remembered that the man called Jake was to come out. The three stood immobile, backgrounded by a scrub cedar, while the man passed; then Bart entered the path, and they followed it over the crest.

There was no moon, and the stars lighted only dimly a zigzag track that led up from the pitch-darkness of what appeared to be a deep slash that ran along the base of the ridge, which had a much more precipitous face, on this side. Hurrying down to the lower level, Bart immediately saw a light a short distance down the slash, and against the face of the cliff. He was surprised to note that it was slightly above the level on which they stood.

The path now had broadened, and hard rock was underfoot, with here and there queer basinlike depressions that he avoiced with difficulty in the uncertain light. Keeping to the wall on the side opposite the ridge, he actually passed the light, which he discovered was on a broad ledge, eight or ten feet above the level of the sluicelike bed in which they were traveling. As they passed, silently, he could see Abelson and another man who must be the one

called Lefty. They were sitting by the fire, and beyond them the puncher saw a dark splotch on the cliffwall that he took to be the mouth of a cavern of some sort. He kept straight on till, after fifty feet, he discovered a clump of boulders which had been avalanched down by some snowslide or torrent. The three drew in among these rocks and waited.

And none too soon, for the lantern came bobbing down the hillside, and in its light Bart saw Fox and Bill. The two came almost at a trot, turning a dozen feet from the three. When they approached the cliff the lantern-light uncovered a flight of crude steps that led up to the level of the ledge. Bounding up these, Fox commenced showering orders right and left in a voice that easily carried down to the listening three.

"Carry all those tools into the cave, Lefty... Roll that bedding up, Abelson... Commence hustling rocks, Bill... Jump, now, all of you!"

The men worked swiftly under Fox's dynamic driving. After seeing them started, he took a hand himself, dumping tinware and cooking utensils into the blankets Abelson was bundling.

Once when Bill stopped near him to shift the rock he was carrying from one shoulder to the other, Fox grabbed it, balanced it easily on one hand and hurled it onto the heap with an effortless sweep of his muscular arm.

Fox glanced up only casually when a fifth man came out of the cavern and stood looking curiously at the others.

He was tall, straight, not over forty, and his body looked fit and hard beneath the undershirt and breeches that were his only clothing. His yellow hair and beard had grown long and straggly, but his skin was clean and ruddy.

Bart started with surprise when a clinking sound attracted his attention, and he saw that a heavy chain was fastened to the man's ankle, and that it ran back into the cavern.

"Looks like it's movin' day," the

chained man said, picking up a kettle and heaving it into the blanket Abelson was gathering up by the corners. When nobody answered him, he shrugged and sat down near the opening of the cave.

Just then Bart felt Speck's trembling body pressed against his. Sensing the situation on the instant, he reached out and caught the rifle his old pard was swinging to a level. "Steady, Ol' Hoss! Easy now—easy—easy! Can't yuh see that hobbled geezer's right in line of your lead?"

"Just stay put till we see what's gonna break!"

WITHIN a quarter of an hour the dunnage had been stored in the cavern, and a heap of rocks was growing beside the entrance. Fox wiped his hands daintily on a white handkerchief and tucked it into the breast of his tweed jacket. He bent before the fire to look at his watch. "Well, I'll be going, Abelson, I'll take Lefty along with me, to help work the stuff over at the house.

"You and Bill carry rock till you have enough to stop that entrance. Make it look as natural as possible. Before you close it, though, put everything inside. Don't leave an empty can or a scrap of paper to show that anyone ever has worked or camped here." He looked fixedly at Abelson for a moment. "You understand me, don't you. I said leave *nothing* outside that cave."

"Shore thing, I gotchu," Abelson chortled. "Nothin' outside when we leave—jus' nothin' a-tall." He leered meaningly at the watching prisoner.

Fox nodded approvingly. "Right. Now step lively. You'll have to hustle to finish and get over to the house and help me get ready to leave there. Come right to the library and report."

"Just a minnit, Fox," the prisoner said, quietly. "I understand what yuh mean, of course. Yuh fellers leave, an' I stay here, with 'nuff lead in me to keep me put."

"I ain't whimperin' none, if that's th' way things is. Jus' thought I'd remind yuh that fur five years yuh been promisin' me that when we got all them sand pockets cleaned out, yuh'd leave me go. I've showed yuh how to git better'n a hundred thousan', an' now—"

"I know—I know," Fox cut in, as one mildly annoyed. "I seem to remember at times I did promise you something of that sort in order to keep you working. Had to do it, as you were the only man who knew where all the pockets were.

"But, promises are just promises, Stanley. I don't mind admitting that I rather like you, too, but I can't let you live, of course. That wouldn't be sensible, under the circumstances.

"Better bring a few larger rocks, boys. You'll find they'll work better on a job like this... And build up that fire a little to furnish light; I'll have to take your lantern... Come on, Lefty... Remember, Abelson, I'm holding you responsible.

"Not a thing to be left outside—not a thing."

Fox picked up the lantern and left by the steps, Lefty tramping at his heels. When they passed the clump of boulders, Bart had to hold Speck again.

The prisoner leaned his powerful back against the cliffwall and locked his hands about his knees. He didn't look up or answer when Abelson came in with a rock and said as he dumped it, "Remember that time yuh cussed me an' tried to bust me with y'ur fist? Remember how yuh laffed at me when Fox took y'ur side an' made me lay off yuh?

"Ain't laffin' none now, eh?"

Abelson shuffled off after another rock. Bart saw Fox's lantern disappear over the ridge. He threw an arm around each of his companions and brought their heads close to his. "T'm gonna ease up them steps," he whispered. "You boys stay here an' keep your lamps trimmed an' burnin', but don't shoot outa y'ur turn. If they git on to

us, that feller won't last a secont."

"You hear what Fox called 'im?" Speck asked, tremulously. "Called 'im, 'Stanley'! That's Harry—my kid brother!"

"Yeh, I know. But keep your shirt on an' play this thing close or you won't have any kid brother. Hold 'im down if yuh kin, Hannon. I'm goin' up."

Speck growled something deep in his chest as Hannon gripped his arm. Bart leaned his rifle against a boulder and glided across to where he knew the steps stood shrouded in darkness. As he was groping along the wall to locate them, he heard Abelson's husky voice, above him: "Carry two-three more big 'uns, Bill, whilst I scoop up this here trash, an' fix th' fire so's it'll burn out clean. Th' first rain'll wash th' ashes away, an' they won't be nothin' left here.

"Hear me, Stanley? Nothin' left here, unnerstan'. Heh-heh-heh! Jus' nothin' a-tall, Fox sez—an' what Fox sez goes."

BILL SHIFFLED off down the ledge. Abelson potted about the fire, staking unburned ends of the wood onto the glowing coals so that it would burn to an ash. After gathering up scattered bits of paper, an empty cracker carton and a can or two, he carried them inside. "Fetch one more bit 'un," he called to Bill, who was just leaving again. Abelson looked all around to be certain he had missed no trash, then picked up the rifle. "Yuh alluz was a amiable cuss, Stanley," he sneered, "so I reckon yuh'll 'blige me, this time.

"I'd admire to hev yuh step back inside thar, so's we won't hev to lug yuh in."

When Stanley looked at him steadily, making no move to obey, Abelson picked up a cedar bough from the fire and waved it till its lighted end blazed brightly. "Mebbe I kin kinda haze yuh in thar with this." Rifle in one hand,

the stick in the other, he stepped toward his intended victim.

In a flash Bart realized that Stanley would fight—odds be damned—and that he was but a few seconds from eternity. The puncher rose above the level of the ridge and called evenly: "Mebbe you better turn that there smokestick this way, feller."

"I ain't chain-hobbled you know."

Abelson grunted, dropped the stick, spun on his heel and swung the rifle around. The killer's rage burned in his bestial, bearded face as he tilted the piece and pulled trigger.

But Bart had leaped as he spoke. As he bounded across the circle of light, he saw the muzzle of the rifle swing into line, almost as though its blue-steel barrel were a live thing, seeking him. He ducked downward and sideways, feeling something tug at the collar of his shirt as the blast of the heavy rifle shook the ledge.

Roaring in rage, Abelson worked the lever and an empty shell slithered onto the ledge. But the agile puncher was close in, now. Catching the rifle-barrel close to the muzzle with his left hand, he pushed upward and backward, at the same time jamming a six-gun at Abelson's heaving paunch. "Let go that gun an' stick 'em up, you poison lizard, ur I'll—"

Across the way by the boulders a heavy rifle blared, and old Speck's high, nasal voice was raised in a sort of cracked war-whoop. Abelson's grip relaxed, allowing the rifle to come free. He stood weaving for a moment, a surprised, questioning look in his muddy eyes. Then he folded slowly, joint after joint, till he lay a sprawled, inert heap at the puncher's feet.

Bart whirled toward the prisoner. "Get inside, feller! Bill'll crack down on yuh!"

"Like hell I will. Slip me that rifle, an' I'll crack down on Bill! After all, this is my fight, yuh know."

"Don't want no more fightin' if we can help it," Bart said. "Fox'll think

two shots is enough to do what he wants done. If we raise much more smoke he'll be gettin' wise."

"Let 'im," Stanley said, as Bart gave him the gun. "I don't know nothin' I'd like better than to get th' chance to—"

"But you ain't th' whole show. They's others to be thought of," Bart countered. "They's a girl over there at the house that—"

"Hey yuh fellers," Bill's voice whined out of the darkness. "Hold y'ur lead! I'm comin' in!"

"Yuh got it on me ev'ry which way," he admitted advancing into the light, his hands upraised. "I ain't got a chinyman's chanct with one six 'g'inst four rifles. It means a rope necktie fur me, mebbe, but all I ast is that yuh never let Fox git 'is hands on me. If he gits th' best of yuh—which he will, I reckon—jus' shoot me an' leave me lay."

SPECK came plunging up the stair, missing his step and falling back twice in his eagerness. Up at last, he ran to his brother, gripping his hand and slapping his broad back as he yammered out a series of incoherent questions. Slow-minded, slow-moving Hannon reached the upper level a little later. Removing his star, he pinned it on the breast of Stanley's undershirt. "Th' statutes provides that a officer serves till 'is successor has been 'lected an' qualified. Nobody ain't done that, so yuh're sheriff, right now."

"When yuh git time, I wish yuh'd tell me what all this is about, anyway."

"Won't take long to do that. Yuh see this slash was runnin' brimful of water, a long, long time ago. They was gold-bearin' sand in it, an' with th' swift current, them pockets down on th' bottom made it work awmost like a reg'lur gold sluice."

"Yuh mean they been packin' sacks of real dust outa here fur five years?" Speck gasped.

"No. No water here, so Fox mule-

packed the rich sand over to his place and worked it there. The slash is eight miles long and the stuff had to be carried out by hand.

"It was a long, hard job, but he made a-plenty, after payin' is help; he's got a hundred thousand in gold bars over there at the house, an' she's mine!"

"Th' snake-bellied fence-creeper put th' word out that yuh was dead, an' th' town folks helt a funeral fur yuh," said Speck, still looking mystified.

"Yeh, I know. They shot th' face clean off Bill Jenkins, one of them prospector fellers; then they put my clothes on 'im an' planted 'im as me."

Stanley looked at the star lovingly, then shook the chain till it rattled. "Git this damn thing off me. Yuh'll find th' key in Abelson pants pocket."

"Gr-r-r! Won't I feel coltish when I get onhobbled for th' first time in nigh on five years!" He hugged the rifle and patted its stock caressingly. "An' won't we make somebody think he's a bogged steer, an' we're a pack of lobos!"

"C'mmencin' as soon's we get that hobble off you an' chain Bill up in your place," Bart decided, fishing a key out of Abelson's pocket and inserting it in the padlock at Stanley's ankle. "If we win this war, we'll come back after Bill an' have 'im hung all decent an' orderly. If we lose, Fox'll come an' git 'im an' bust 'im in two. Bill'll know which in a few hours." "Mebbe we orter go to town an' git a posse," cautious Hannon suggested.

"An' have Fox clean up an' ramble whilst we're doin' it—mebbe after killin' a woman or two," Bart objected.

"But they's anyway a dozen of 'em, an' Fox is—"

"Jus' one more feller, an' we gotta get 'im."

"Haze yourself over here, Bill, an' get your bracelet on. It shore is becomin' to your style of beauty."

"Now peel them boots off. They'll fit our new sheriff, an' he needs 'im."

- 8 -



FULL MOON was riding high in a cloudless sky when Bart Lyons halted his little force at the edge of the clearing that surrounded the Fox's den. Its every angle clearly outlined in the mellow light, the big house

looked to be a-bustle with activity. A light glowed in the library, another in the corner room above it. Voices and footsteps sounded within. Once the listening puncher heard Fox's arrogant, impatient voice delivering an order of some sort.

"Let's hit 'em," Stanley suggested, at Bart's elbow.

"Ho-hum," the puncher lamented. "Speck was ringy enough, but yuh're some worse. Fox ain't give me half as much trouble as yuh two Stanleys."

"Hit 'em eh? Mebbe we better locate 'em first."

"Most of 'em'll be workin' in that stone shed back of the bunkhouse," Stanley said. "They's a waterpipe back there, an' they use it to wash out th' stuff. Let's hit 'em."

"Mebbe we better wait till I go round-up a posse," Hannon argued.

"Ho-hum," Bart sighed again. "If I ain't got me one funny little army. Two bit-champin' geezers want to go stampedin' in 'thout findin' th' lay of th' land; another long-figgerin' jasper wants to wait till Fox is outa th' country."

"All three of you squat back of that there hoss trough whilst I go projectin' fur a little while."

The two Stanleys grumbled a little, but the three finally obeyed. After seeing them tucked behind the trough, Bart catfooted to the house and peered into the library. Fox was at his desk in his shirt sleeves, a heap of papers

before him. He was sorting them rapidly, tucking a few into a small satchel on a corner of the desk, tossing others into the fireplace. A long-barreled revolver lay within easy reach of his right hand, and a rifle leaned against the wall, by the fireplace. After watching him for a little time, Bart turned the corner of the house and peered into the dining room. It was lighted, but no-one was there. A coffee urn and a platter of sandwiches were on the table. Bart could not forbear grinning when he noted that several pendants still were missing from the chandelier.

A visit to the rear of the place showed that the kitchen had a dim light, but appeared to be empty. Bart slanted across the yard toward the darkened bunkhouse. Rounding it, he found the stone shed Stanley had mentioned. Inside it, he counted ten men, all working at top speed. Some were dumping small quantities of the rich sand into board sluices with cross-grooved bottoms; others played water into the sluices. The puncher was delighted to see that but five of the ten men wore their belts, and no rifles were in sight. Another thing that pleased him was that the shed had but one door, and the windows had heavy bars. He immediately circled back to where the three greeted him with a barrage of eager questions. "Yeh, now's our time," he told them, then explained what he had discovered.

"Well, what are we waitin' fur?" Stanley wanted to know.

"We ain't waitin' for much," Bart assured him. "Just to line up our work."

"Gonna hit th' shed first, or th' house?" Speck asked.

"Both—you three hit th' shed; I hit th' house."

"But—"

"No 'buts' anywheres aroun'. If we cracked down on them skunks in th' shed, Fox would sashay out an' blister us from behind. If we hit th' house first, them polecats would come a-run-

nin' an' make hash of us.

"I'm goin' into that house an' get Fox an'—"

"No human can do that all by himself," Hannon objected.

"This human's gonna try," Bart assured him.

"But he's got cat ears an' cat eyes—"

"I don't care a damn if he's got tiger eyes an' grizzly claws, I'm goin' in there an' give him an argument.

"Now listen close: You three ease over there an' plant yourself in th' corner of the corral right in front of that shed door. Play dead till you hear bizness pick up over at th' house.

"There'll be shootin'—no question 'bout that. After it's over, either Fox or me'll come out of there.

"Meanwhilst your work's gonna be simple—though I ain't sayin' it's gonna be easy. All you do is to throw lead in every damn geezer that comes through that shed door.

"Only half of 'em is packin' hardware; they'll bust out prompt when me an' Fox starts our circus. It'll take the others a little while to get their belts an' set in.

"Now get over there an' fix yourselves as judicious as possible, an' remember this: It's no use to shoot, 'less you hit somebody.

"Pick your men when th' rush starts, an' stack that door so full of dead ones that the others can't climb over 'em.

"Now let's get goin'."

"Fox'll hear you when you try to sneak up on 'im," Hannon predicted.

"I ain't gonna sneak up on 'im," Bart declared. "For that very reason, an' bein's you mentioned it, I'll ast you to change shoes with me."

"I'll do 'er, but I can't see why," Hannon grumbled, as he sat down on the edge of the trough and commenced hauling off a boot.

Busy unlacing a moccasin, Bart made no comment. When Hannon handed him a boot, he shook it, and it jingled lightly. "Won't do," he an-

nounced. "Here, Speck, lend me them long-shanked spurs of yourn. That's th' kind Abelson wore, wasn't it?"

Speck sat down on the trough also, an heaved up a foot. "Uh-huh. An' I reckon I get your play. It may work, at that."



AFTER completing the exchange of foot-gear, Bart remained at the trough and watched the others disappear into the corral; then he rounded the house and walked boldly along the path that led to its rear entrance. Stepping normally, he crossed the porch and opened the kitchen door.

The puncher felt his muscles tighten when, upon entering the room he saw that, when scouting the place, he had overlooked the Chinese servant, who was sitting with his feet on the hearth of the cookstove. But the Oriental merely blinked at him sleepily, then dropped his chin to his chest, apparently to resume an interrupted nap.

Relieved, Bart crossed the room and opened the door that led toward the front of the house. Passing through it, he found himself in a long, dark hall. To the left he knew would be the dining room; at the far end, light showed through the half-opened door of the library.

So far, so good, but the puncher

swore between his even teeth when bootheels welted the rear porch, then crossed the kitchen floor.

The damnable luck of it, to have someone come from the shed, just at this time! Knowing that his situation now was desperate, that, at best, he would be between two fires, and that the man behind him might enter the hall at any second and see him and call a warning to Fox, Abelson steeled himself to walk deliberately, imitating Abelson's heavy tread as best he could.

His heart sang when, after having covered half the distance to the half-open library door, Fox called through it: "That you, Abelson?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, step along, dammit! I've still got those damned women on my hands and—"

Bart had "stepped along"—the more readily because he had heard the kitchen door swing and someone enter the hall behind him.

Hooking his thumbs in his belt, the puncher showed on the threshold of the library door, then stepped inside and kicked the door shut.

Fox stiffened in his chair, his handsome face aflame with hatred, his eyes glittering like a rattler's, as he cast a quick side-glance toward the gun on the desk.

"Stand up, Fox—stand up an' make your grab! I know I hadn't ought do it, but I'm givin' you a break," Bart said, quietly. "I'm drawin' when your hand touches th' butt!"

As the puncher spoke, he kept his eyes locked unwaveringly with Fox's; but he sidled along the wall a little way from the door as he heard the man in the hall approach it.

Fox heard, too, and his mouth twisted into a grin—a wicked, leering grin that had a hint of triumph in it.

"I give you your break," Bart prompted him. "Better take it quick! I ain't waitin' till that other geezer gets—"

The unknown man in the hall fum-

bled at the door and the lock grated. Bart's left-hand gun slapped a slug through the door, just as Fox struck at the six on the desk.

Two guns spoke almost in unison. Fox jerked the length of his powerful body, then braced himself and raised his six again.

He stood so while another slug from the puncher's gun tore into his massive chest and a third drilled through his belt. Again, he made a feeble, hesitant effort to raise a gun that appeared to have grown too heavy for him. His fingers relaxed and the six clattered to the floor. He sat down slowly, then pitched forward suddenly, his hands spanking the desktop. For a time the great shoulder muscles writhed and moved no more.

Out in the hall there was a queer shuffling, dragging sound, a groan, then silence. Over by the corrals there was a chorus of wild yells, and the roll of pistol-fire.

Bart jerked the front door open and bounded into the yard. "Hold 'em, boys!" he roared, as he turned toward the mass of dancing pinpoints that showed by the long, low building. "Hold 'em ten seconds till I get there! Feelin' as I do right now, I b'lieve I can lick th' whole durned outfit of 'em!"

AND THE boys did hold them—held them pinned close to the shed, a writhing welter of living and dead. Held them and drove them relentlessly back inside, while Bart edged to the end of the building and raked its inside systematically with a double spray of searching lead.

Through the wreaths of acrid smoke that spiralled lazily upward from floor to ceiling, Bart saw three still forms piled grotesquely by the open door. Back of them, a scowling bewhiskered man lay flat on the floor, firing blindly over the still forms. Paying no attention to him, the puncher turned his sixes on three others, who were starting a con-

centrated rush from the far end of the room.

The first man of the three crashed down, squirming and bellowing in pain and panic. The second swerved from his line of flight, edging erratically toward the north wall of the building till he struck it with terrific impact. The third stopped, hesitated, then dropped his guns and raised his hands high. A fourth fellow, who had just started to back the rush of the three, saw his support fizzle out suddenly. He lined up beside the one who had surrendered, and the two stood motionless, their eyes fixed fearfully on the doorway, through which lead still was horning.



Bart turned the corner of the building and walked into the belt of light that streamed through the splintered doorway. The fire from the corral stopped, and Speck's voice came stridently, "Hey, yuh chuckleheaded wampus, wanta git y'urself beefed?"

"War's over," Bart called back, then reloaded his sixes and stepped inside. "Any of you leaky lead-gatherers that can still walk had better ease out there in th' center of th' room an' pile your hardware," he suggested. "Take your turns an' don't crowd th' mourners. Incidental, don't no interprisin' gent get itchy an' go to scratchin' 'is hips none, when he peels off 'is belt. These sixes of mine is all het up an' rarin' for more action, an'—"

"Come right on in, Stanley! Gee-whillikens but you're what a feller

might call one lucky sheriff!

"Here you got a nice little bunch of genteel-mannered prisoners. Most of 'em's slightly damaged, but who cares?"

"Th' pretty part of it is that this here stronghouse is th' best jail I ever seen. Soon's we've dumped them guns outside, we can lock that big padlock an' take our time 'bout arrangin' to trail-herd this big-eyes bunch into town.

"Whilst you fellers is moppin' up an' kinda sortin' them geezers over to see how many of 'em is worth savin' for a day or two, I'll lope over to th' big house an' see what's goin' on 'mongst them wimmin."

THE CHINESE still sat by the stove, stoically indifferent to the turmoil, when Bart passed through the kitchen. Going down the hall, he turned to the right where a spiraling stairway led up to the second floor, where he found himself in another hallway.

A strip of light showed beneath the door of the north-west room, and Bart heard a soft rustling sound inside as he approached it and rapped.

Silence! Then another soft rustle and a few whispered words. Bart knuckled the door lightly again, more than a little worried.

"Stay back," the girl's tremulous voice fluted out. "Stay back, or I'll certainly shoot!"

"Awright, Miss," Bart acquiesced, amiably, grinning with relief at the sound of her voice. "Far be it from me to deny a lady her pleasures.

"But, if you're dead set on gunnin' me some, mebbe you better open th' door so's you git a better bead."

"Oh," she trilled, "is it really you?"

"Reckon it's me, if I know myself," he answered. "Open th' door, an' mebbe you can help to identify me."

Slipped feet click-clocked to the door and stopped on the threshold to remove his hat and bow politely. "Evenin', Miss.

"Cuttin' off a few million questions, I'm tellin' yuh that you're plumb safe, ev'ry which way."

"And Fox?"

"Fox is— Well, let's just forget him. Call 'im a bad dream, an' let 'im go at that."

A gasping sound from the other end of the room caused Bart to take his gaze off the girl for the first time. Reclining in a cushioned rocker, obviously in a half-swoon, the white-haired woman looked at him through half-closed lids. "Fox-is-just-a-bad-dream," she repeated as scarce comprehending.

Bart crossed the room and lifted one of her hands and patted it reassuringly. "Ev'ry little thing is gonna be awright, Ma'am. It's been a bad night, but th' sun's gonna come up in th' mornin' Ev'rything else is gonna be just like that."

The girl still was holding a toylike pistol. She tossed it on the bed and fairly raced across the rug to stand beside the puncher and turn her cool, deep eyes directly on his. "Bart Lyons, you're something that I never encountered before.

"You're one great big real man!"

When she locked her fingers impulsively around his arm, Bart felt his cheeks burn.

"Hey, Bart!" Speck's thin nasal voice called from the lower hall. "Where in th' humped-up, hee-lary-ous hell have yuh holed in?"

"Here," Bart called back. "C'mon up an' tell these wimminfolks I ain't lyin' to 'em!"

Heavy steps chugged up the steps and Speck came grinning in, followed by Stanley—a bearded viking in a soiled undershirt and trousers. He carried a black satchel, which he set on a small table by the bed. "Some bonds in there that I reckon b'longs to you, Ma'am."

HE LOOKED at Bart, and when he grinned, the puncher noted for the

The Arapaho had a reason to be wary of Conrad Bard; a man who talked as if his dead partner were still by his side must be in league with spirits!

THE CRIMSON COUP STICK



by A. A. BAKER

FORT KEARNEY was a hundred miles behind the blizzarded in Conrad Bard—the one post not disbanded in the vast Powder River Country, and now a lonely fighting stronghold in the Arapaho country. A tough skinned prey. The Arapaho nation was a divided unit as Bleeding Arm and Sagsawan, the medicine man, fought for power. Bleeding Arm's honor was at stake as a signature on the Big Piney treaty, while Sagsawan led the warriors in daily raids against the long knives.

The sloping hills ahead of the lonely figure of Conrad Bard were a patched snow dirtied sheet. Crystaled ice pushed its glittering fingers up through the crisp ground as Bard crept carefully, head hunched low on his broad shoulders, circling the white horse.

"Jeb—Jeb Riley..." Bard mouthed the words, inching his forefinger along the steel of the rifle trigger and lifting the barrel to point. "Jeb, I long hobbled the mare. She's belly high in them willows—you watch them warriors smell her out. Just set tight, Jeb, and I'll show you how to kill Indians..."

Conrad Bard didn't expect an answer. Slapping the powdered snow from

his gloved hand, he pulled the glove free and ran an exploring finger through the crusted wound running from the nape of his thick neck to the hollow under his muscled jaw. His yellowish sick eyes, glazed now, caught the swift motions of two Arapaho. The mare whinnied and Conrad stepped through the glistening sage and raised his rifle.

"There now!" he fired. "That's number one, Jeb. Get the other, damn-it!" Gritting curses, Bard waited a second for his order to be followed, then raised the rifle again and let it lead the running brave, now crowhopping through the sage, making a desperate spurt to reach the willows.

The warm chamber of the rifle was flush against Bard's jaw as its sights followed the running figure. For a second, the action brought sanity to the rifleman and he knew why Jeb Riley wasn't replying or taking action; then he snapped the trigger and saw the second warrior disappear. Conrad shucked the shell, knowing he had waited too long. That was Jeb's target, he thought fuzzily, and Jeb hadn't even fired!

"They'll kill you fast enough!" Bard plodded forward; kneeling beside the sprawled brave, he made a quick cir-

cle with his knife into the fat of the scalp. He rose, wiping the knife. "Don't feel guilty about it, Jeb." Conrad corraled the white mare and led the animal back to his solitary camp.

MEANWHILE, Captain John Keel was staring down at the frozen remains of Jeb Riley. The wagon was halted at the Fort Kearney gate. Captain Keel hoisted a polished boot from the mud, softened by the sentry's tramping and lifted his tall frame over the wagon boards to draw back the frozen army blanket. The body of Conrad Bard's partner was sodden with blood and stiffened by frost. Wind flailed snow gathered on the dead face.

"How far out?" Keel turned to the teamster.

"Found him on the fourth ridge beyond the wood lot," the teamster answered. "God! Can't them Arapaho do a job?"

"Anything out there," the captain lowered the blanket and smoothed its stiff folds, "of Conrad Bard?"

"Fresh blood on the snow showed that he'd been plugged; I don't figure he got away." The teamster was working a chew around his jaws and spat. "After we found Riley's corpse, we come across four scalped braves. Ever' one with one ear gone with the scalp."

"Conrad Bard's mark," nodded Captain Keel. "Then, he got away."

"If he got away, why hasn't he come in?"

"He will. Conrad's a..." began the captain.

"A damned Injun killer!" interrupted the teamster. "You can lay Riley's death to his partner; ain't an Arapaho from here to Powder River ain't out to get Bard. T'ain't safe to walk across the compound with him."

"Maybe so," concurred the captain. "We'd better get Riley buried." He dropped down off the wagon and

turned back to the man on the seat. "I'm telling you right now," he added slowly, "that if Conrad Bard's still alive out there, the whole damned tribe'd better hunt a deep hole and pull the hole over them!"

Keel nodded to the sentry at head-quarter's door, pushed it open and entered the hot room.

"They find him?" Colonel Ralph looked up.

"Just Riley."

"Think Bard got away?"

"He got away—but he's on a killing spree..." began the captain.

"Damn it man! He can't be. If he doesn't get word to Fetterman about our condition here..." The colonel rose to his feet and faced the stove. "Sagsawan is sitting out there with three thousand warriors! Fetterman hasn't any idea that our supplies were destroyed. How long can men live on maggoty hardtack?"

"Maybe Bleeding Arm can hold down Sagsawan." The captain's words were halting, but carried hope. "Bleeding Arm hasn't got over his lesson at Powder River."

"Sagsawan's smart enough to use Bard's spree to work up his braves for an attack on Kearney!"

"Can't we send another messenger?" the captain asked.

"With seven dead, and Riley number eight, I can't ask..."

"Let me arrange a meeting with Bleeding Arm." The captain was insistent. "He'll talk..."

"You and that damned Bleeding Arm!" The colonel, raising his stubby arms and lifting one booted foot onto the stove railing, looked like a pink checked, performing bear.

"It's a bad winter," Captain Keel continued to insist, "and Indians, starving Indians, need time to hunt. Bleeding Arm can give us a respite."

"If he can control that hatchet-killing Sagsawan..." the colonel's face lighted... "If the Indians are so bad

off, perhaps Washington can be persuaded to let us conduct a winter campaign."

"On hardtack?" reminded the captain. "On grass fed horses?"

"Can you even *reach* Bleeding Arm? scornfully asked the colonel. "And, if you do, can out-talk that medicine man of his? Can you shake devils out of a squash gourd? When a full chief of the Arapaho nation can't control one medicine man, how in hades do you expect to swing them murdering devils?" The colonel puckered his mouth to spit and Captain Keel answered.

"But Bleeding Arm signed the treaty. His honor ..."

"Damn the treaty. *We've* lived up to every word. Dismantled our forts and—double-damn those Washington politicians. Pulling us out of Powder River when we had Red Cloud under the Second Californians and the Ohio Calvary. The Sioux, under Red Cloud, are raiding again. And don't forget, he signed the treaty too! Bleeding Arm's honor!" The Colonel spoke the words like a curse. "But, go ahead—talk to the double dealing jackal."

"Under a truce flag," Captain Keel said flatly, "we'll have a chance."

"Then take a sergeant. Take the best horses on the post. Take a volunteer. Every man on the post should jump at the chance to get out of this starvation hole."

Captain Keel saluted and spun about, leaving Colonel Ralph attempting to cram a three pronged stick of sagebrush into his soggy fire. "Oh, Captain." Keel turned from the door. "Take a medic kit. Bard's out there and you may find him ... *Before* the Indians do."

CONRAD BARD was a sprawled hump on top of the rusty, egg-shaped boulder. A streak of black blood scarred the hand gripping the rawhide string. His head wound had opened and his tanned face was hot

with fever. His eyes were the slits of a sick man avoiding the sun's glare. Stubbled whiskers, black against his face, moved as he whispered. "There's another one, Jeb. Stay back and let me handle him alone."

The brave was on a black army mule. A Pawnee, tugging at the reins, but the stubborn animal, sensing the crouched man, fought the bit and jumped through the rocks. He had tied himself onto the animal by looping a rawhide cord over his shoulders and passing the loop under the animal's belly. Busy with the wayward mule, the Pawnee was unaware of Bard's huddled form until the waiting man left the rocks in a leap that landed him astraddle the startled warrior.

Bard's thick arms looped the garroting string over the brave's turned head, digging into the muscles of the straining neck. The mule fell, but Bard's body dropped loosely, rolling away from the flashing hoofs. He fought the struggling man until the looped knot was buried in the windpipe and the dying breath of the warrior whistled like a reed pipe.

Bard let loose and the mule straggled to its feet, moved a few steps then, feeling the drag of the still strapped Pawnee, bucked through the rocks; carrying the burden over the rough ground.

Bard leaned against the boulder, brushed the mud from his shoulder, sucked in a deep breath and shouted. "See you at camp, Jeb. I'm following after that mule till I get that scalp."

Half buried in the torn and muddy earth, an oilskin-covered dispatch letter winked whitely. Bard moved after the mule, hefting his knife. And Colonel Ralph's plea to Fetterman for supplies, lay unnoticed on the ground.

CAPTAIN KEEL reined in his windced horse and raised a gloved arm. Sergeant White moved to an even position and the two men stared at the

distorted, frozen form of the dead Pawnee.

"Right ear gone," muttered the sergeant. "Bard's coup stick will be getting full!"

"The last one he killed with a rifle. This one," Captain Keel motioned to the garroting rawhide, "he strangled. He was dragged by a shod mule. Sergeant, backtrack those tracks—looks like they came through by that big round rock."

The captain dismounted, walking his horse in the brittle air, until he caught the sergeant's shout. The man galloped his horse back, waving the muddy dispatch letter.

"Found 'em in the mud. Bard was on the top of the rock—that Pawnee never lived long..."

"Pawnee?" Keel's voice was startled.

"Yeah, one of North's old scouts. He was riding an army mule. North used mules sometimes, then give the Pawnees the critters when they was sent home after the Powder River fight. Bard's on a crazy-killing spree all right."

"Crazy?"

"Wounded too, Captain; I found dried blood on top of that rock."

"His direction, you'll note, Sergeant. He's heading straight into Arapaho lands."

"After Sagsawan?"

"Or Bleeding Arm himself."

"Maybe he'll get in," grunted the sergeant, "but he'll never get out!"

"Maybe he doesn't care, Sergeant. Y'see, Jeb Riley was his partner."

CONRAD BARD knew he was about finished. The cords of his neck had tightened, drawing his head almost onto his right shoulder. An hour ago, he had retched away the dizziness but it was back and a hot drum beat flexed his temple veins.

His fire gave off little heat as he squatted, fleshing the stiff scalps until

they were as thin as an oil lamp shade. He had two thin willow loops and fitted the pliable skin over the loops. Then, with hands cracked by the cold, daubed red clay liberally over the skin. He added the latest scalp to a willow staff and shook it violently.

"Jeb..." his mouth functioned with difficulty... "Jeb, you ain't sorry you came? Another day—another day..." his words halted. He knew what he wanted to say, but his throbbing, fevered brain lost contact with his lips. Bard rose, gripped his coup stick with its reddened scalps, and stumbled out into the wind. Behind him, his rifle still leaned against a rock, glittering from the vagrant flickers of the dying fire.

The cold clear sun was setting as the staggering man crested the knob of a rolling hill. Below, behind a small fire, a war party were gouging holes in the shore ice of a small stream to let their ponies drink.

The coldly watchful eyes of a horse-tender stared toward the man. A guttural shout left the warrior's lips and all eyes were lifted. Long seconds passed, then Conrad Bard lifted his coup stick. He pointed the firesharp-ened end, drew his bowie knife and, in a pathetic stumbling travesty of a run, made his charge.

Three days later, Conrad Bard opened his eyes. The sun gleamed through the taut skins overhead and he knew he was in a wigwam. He raised his head, and the pain of his torn neck sent reeling heat through his brain. He brushed out at the blunt hands probing his wound.

"Easy." Captain Keel lifted his hands and watched Bard's pain filled eyes open again. "Your wound's got to be cleaned, then the lips of the cut pressed together. Some sort of tendon is cut and we've got to do something about that..."

"You're Captain Keel?" It was a

single question seeming to ask a thousand.

"That's right, Bard. And, Bard, we're all in a mess. Sergeant White's dead; those yelling devils are pulling his entrails around the camp like a string of meat. Bleeding Arm and Sagsawan are raving."

"Where's Jeb?" And suddenly Bard remembered. He remembered the deadly attack. The shouts of the taunting Indians as they emerged over the hill behind the woodlot. Their grisly whoops as they sank their lances into Riley's quivering body. He recalled the shock of the bullet as it tore the flesh from his own neck. "Jeb's dead," he said flatly.

Captain Keel nodded. "Ten days dead and, we're in the Arapaho camp. While the chiefs decide in just how many sections our bodies can be disjointed—" he smiled bitterly, "before we die."

"Ten days? Where—where have I been? Have I been here ten days?"

"No, maybe three days." Quickly, the captain explained the corpse strewn trail of the man before him. Of the lost dispatch and his own entry into the Arapaho camp under a white flag. "But they wouldn't listen!" Keel's voice filled with bitterness.

"Sagsawan was a madman. Bleeding Arm tried to interfere but he was jostled aside; until the squaws had torn the sergeant apart. It's that damned coup stick of yours." The captain reached behind Bard and drew forth the willow shaft.

"Seven scalps, six Arapaho and one Pawnee." He flipped the flowing black hair from the top scalp, exposing its drying ear. The ear was flattened at the lobe. "It seems they recognized this one as Sagsawan's son!"

"Don't ask me why you're still in one piece," the captain continued. "There's only one possible explanation—maybe two. First, the Indians respect and fear a crazy man. They

think the spirits have control of his body and are afraid to offend those spirits. Or..."

"Or," interrupted Conrad Bard, "they just saved me until I was able to feel. Sagsawan wouldn't have any fun less'n I knew how bad it hurt, eh, Captain?"

CAPTAIN KEEL nodded solemnly and a long pause fell between the two men. Bard struggled to a sitting position, waited until the lodge poles stopped whirling then asked a question. "But, why'd they skip you, if White is...?"

"Bleeding Arm respects a truce flag," answered the captain. "He thinks of his people. He knows they'll starve—are starving—because they fight instead of hunting. He wants a respite, but Sagsawan..." The captain shrugged.

"Can you get Bleeding Arm alone?"

"I tried." The captain spread his arms hopelessly. "He's a merciful old man, but—well listen for yourself."

The angry shouts came clearly from the council tent. The booming voice of Sagsawan rolled through the skin walls.

"When they come," Conrad Bard was staring at the coup stick, "ask only one thing. Ask that Bleeding Arm be merciful and kill you with a pistol." He glared into the captain's startled face. "Tell them this. Tell them that they can butcher *me* any devilish way they want—even skin me alive—but ask that you be killed with a pistol ball—in the hands of Bleeding Arm." Bard raised a weak hand, then lay back and added quietly. "If you do this, we'll live to see Fort Kearney again."

A threshing shuffle of feet at the opening interrupted Captain Keel's protests. He whirled and stared at the painted faces of three warriors sent to escort the captives to the council tent. Each carried an unsheathed blade, and the foremost man probed Bard from

His buffalo rug with the sharp tip of a feathered lance. Captain Keel felt his arms yanked behind his back and the cut of a thin rawhide bite into his wrists. Then he was jammed against the bodies and shunted into the cold air. He gulped a big breath of the sparkling air before he was jerked through another opening and found himself, with Conrad Bard at his side, facing seven men in the smoky skin hung tent.

A fire, its white smoke being sucked toward a hole at the apex of the ridge poles, lighted the darkly forboding faces of the chiefs. Sagsawan, brawny arms uncovered, folded across his huge glistening chest. A brutal scar, gouging its course across one eye, gave him a forbidding scowl. His lips were wet, like a man who has just finished a vibrant harangue.

Bleeding Arm, smooth face hiding his thoughts, was on his feet. His wasted torso, boney under a skin shirt, made him appear the smallest man in the room. But the wrinkled forehead, and the squinting eyes sunk below the wide forehead, told Captain Keel that Bleeding Arm was not a man who had been bested.

Conrad Bard sensed that the old chief was fighting for control of the other chiefs. Their aged faces were doubtful, their eyes darting between Sagsawan and Bleeding Arm.

"Captain!" Bleeding Arm spoke halting English. "Our chiefs say you die!"

"Your chiefs," the captain's voice was steady, "are dishonored. We have come to treaty. My sergeant has been killed..."

Bleeding Arm spread his hands. "It is our law. You die, and the crazy one..."

"Then kill us by the gun. By your hand." Captain Keel heard his words as though they came from outside himself.

"The crazy one..." continued

Bleeding Arm, but Captain Keel shouted angrily. "The crazy one is two men!" He pushed Conrad Bard forward. "You see but one here—he sees another. Beside him, his blood brother stands. His brother speaks through his lips."

The squatting chiefs stiffened. Bleeding Arm let his eyes run around the circle. His smooth lids dropped over his eyes. "And what does his shadow brother say?"

"From the land behind the sun," Captain Keel replied, facing Bard and desperate hope laced his words, "let the words of your shadow brother come through!"

CONRAD stepped haltingly forward, his face a grotesque mask. "Jeb Riley speaks—now listen." His voice became a bubbling chant. "Until the Arapaho dishonor has been cleaned—the land behind the sun will be closed to all. The dead shall rot on the plains—their shadows will be caught in the roots of the sage..." Bard's face glistened, his sick eyes moved in a fixed circle, then stopped and rested on the face of Sagsawan. The chief next to him leaned away, covering his eyes.

They all waited, but Conrad stared fixedly, a wooden man, his body possessed by the shadow of his dead partner.

Captain Keel stared as Bleeding Arm questioned gently. "How is the honor of the Arapaho to be cleaned?"

"Take the pistol of the captain—my shadow will pass into you..." Bard's lips moved but his feverish eyes were fixed on the frozen face of Sagsawan. The smoke of the fire seemed to part as Bleeding Arm held out a thin hand and the pistol was pushed into it. His eyes were lidded as he cocked the heavy weapon, holding it with both hands. His arms raised and he turned slowly. His thin body straightened until he was as woodenly stiff as Bard.

The yawning muzzle passed over the heads of the seated chiefs. The

barrel brushed the jacket of the captain then passed slowly on and a shout of rage erupted from Sagsawan as he struggled to his feet. The trigger tripped and the flare of flame spat the slug into the center of Sagsawan's forehead.

The chiefs looked up, their eyes solemn as the sound of the explosion shattered the silence and Sagsawan's body pitched across the thin flame of the fire.

"It was a chance." Conrad Bard sat his horse loosely, his twisted neck stiff against the shoulder as he stared to-

ward the east. Captain Keel held the lead rope of the third horse and looked back to the mutilated body of Sergeant White, dangling over the squeaking saddle.

"Bleeding Arm caught on quick," he said softly. "You gave him just the chance he wanted. By killing Sagsawan, by order of the spirit world, he freed his people from the grip of the warriors. They can now hunt and live, instead of fighting and dying. Bleeding Arm got his truce—and Fort Kearney is safe."



The Secret of Fox Range

(continued from page 71)

first time, the resemblance between the two brothers. Speck looked at Bart then the girl. His contented grin spread till it encompassed both his sun-cooked ears. "Lookee there, Harry," he chorled. "I reckon that th' one question we got unsettled is took care of."

"Yuh see, Bart—yuh too, Miss—we found 'nuff yellow stuff out there in that stronghouse to fix any man fur life. It's all Harry's, an' he's no hawg. So, he's give this ranch to me an' Bart, Clamin' that we earnt it, fair an' squar'."

"I was plumb willin', but I knowed I'd never feel comfortable in a fancy-shennagan house like this here. We reckoned that Bart would feel a little lonesome in it, too."

"So we was a-wonderin' who was gonna—"

"Yuh talk to durn much with y'ur mouth, yuh elephant-eared, circle-legged ol' dew-drinker," Bart intervened, getting the big idea. "Me an' Miss Randolph ain't any more'n got 'quainted, yet."

Speck's grin couldn't get any wider, but his chuckling voice rose: "Barely 'quainted, eh."

"Then how come she's forgot to take 'er hands off y'ur arm, even when company is present. An' how come y'ur

other arm has disappeared somewheres behin' 'er back, an'—"

Speck's chuckle rose to a hoarse guffaw as the girl crimsoned and stepped free. "Th' house is took, Harry," he declared, uproariously, "an' it's took by th' whitest pard a feller ever was neckroped to, an' th' only female woman I ever seen that didn't set my teeth on aige."

"Uncle Speck is gonna bed down comfortable in th' bunkhouse, but he's gonna come over here occasional to take chuck an' gargle a toddy or two, an' watch th' Fox's den change over to a doves' roost."

"That'll be 'nough," Bart growled. "If yuh had as much sense as a uneddicated lizard, yuh'd know yuh was dead wrong when yuh 'sinate that me an' her—er—"

The puncher stopped talking and trembled for sheer joy when Miss Randolph cut in smilingly. "But, is he wrong?"

"If you say he is, you're not the man I took you to be."

"C'mon, Harry, Speck ordered, soberly. "I reckon it's time fur all innocent bystanders to git outa here."



Once a man is unable to do either harm or good any more, it is wrong to let someone who loved him think he died a hero?



CONDEMNED HERO

by H. A. HUFF

SLOAN MURFEY strode angrily down the dusty main street of Sandy River carrying his saddle over his shoulder. In front of the *Blue Chip Saloon*, he eased the saddle onto the board steps, wiped his forehead with his shirt sleeve and pushed back his sweat-rimmed hat.

His brown eyes were hard as he looked at the men, lounging on the boardwalk. They eyed him curiously and Sloan knew they were wondering why he walked into town. It was the worst kind of disgrace for a man to come afoot to strange parts.

He grinned wryly, not satisfying their unspoken questions. Then he turned and moseyed into the saloon. The men playing poker at the round tables glanced at him and returned to their cards. At the end of the bar, he saw a young woman dressed in a split riding skirt and long-sleeved shirt.

Sloan nodded and ordered a double whiskey. He asked the bartender, "Is Tod Benton around? Where does he live?"

The bartender's bushy brows bristled. "You a friend?"

Sloan nodded. "We meet up once a

year in Dodge City when we take cattle to market. Thought I'd drop by for a spell of talking, beings as I'm in these parts."

The bartender stared at him, saying nothing.

The young woman at the end of the bar came closer. She licked her lips. "I'm Mary Benton, Tod's sister."

Sloan swept off his hat. "Howdy, ma'am. I sure am real honored to meet up with you."

Her blue eyes were speculating. "It seems odd that he never spoke of you." Her statement was more of a question.

A slow smile spread over Sloan's face. It started with his wide lips and worked way up to his eyes, which crinkled like paper. "Why ma'am, I don't reckon he'd be talking about it, seeing as how we don't expect to see each other excepting there." His eyes twinkled. "I kind of take his earnings off him in friendly games."

She answered his smile. "That's Tod, all right; he never was a gambler."

"Was?" Sloan's eyes widened. "What do you mean, was?"

She shook her head. "Let's get out of here."

He paid for his drink and followed her outside.

She turned to him. "We might as we'll ride out to the ranch. I'll tell you going out."

Sloan rubbed his chin. "I reckon before I do any riding, I got to buy me a horse."

Mary's eyes widened. "A horse? How'd you get here? Blow in with the wind?"

A GAIN, Sloan's face was serious. A muscle in his cheek twitched and he hardened his jaw. "I have a real good reason to believe," he said, "that folks aren't too friendly in these parts. A couple of miles from town, I was punching the breeze when two fellows popped out of the bushes and shot my horse out from under me."

"What?" she cried, her face paling.

"Yes, ma'am; it was two fellows. Short, dark men, built right close to the ground. It appeared likely they was hunting trouble. Why, I sure don't know."

"The Jones brothers!" she said under her breath. Then she looked at him. "Do you know them?"

"No, ma'am; that's what struck me as being so loco. Plumb strangers to me, they were."

She started off. "Come on. We'll buy you a horse at the stables." As an afterthought, she threw over her shoulder, "You have any money?"

"Why, sure. I just quit a good job of three years' standing. Figured I better see the world while I was young. I've had real good luck riding the chucklines. Then I figured, seeing I wasn't far from Tod, I'd come visiting."

Mary smiled. "Tell you what. We'll rent you a horse. You can have one of ours. If," her eyes were wide, "you'll work for us for a while."

Sloan was surprised. "What kind of

work?" He was thinking he'd sure like to work where Mary was.

"Cowpoking." Then her words started tumbling out. "Pa's getting old for ranching and Tod disappeared last week." She leaned close to him and Murfey's knees felt plumb weak. Her hair smelled like clean soap, and her skin was fresh as a western sunset.

He took a deep breath, finally absorbing her words about Tod. "What happened to him?"

"The Jones Brothers," she whispered. "They're trying to run us out so they can get our spread."

Sloan's lips thinned. "Why?"

"Our ranch divides their spread. We have a good watering hole on our place and they're going to get it if they have to kill us for it."

"Do you reckon," Sloan said slowly, "they thought maybe I was coming to help, and they weren't taking any chances?"

She shrugged. "Could be."

"Then I'll be right honored to cowpoke for you. I got a little debt to pay them myself. Besides, finding Tod." He rubbed his chin. "How about the sheriff? Isn't he doing something?"

Her voice was tired. "Sheriff isn't much of one. He's scared silly of the Jones's and he figures on living a long life. He can't do that if he bucks them."

Things were stacking up and getting more complicated all the time. Sloan said, "I'm itching to get started. I'm not figuring on cashing in my chips, but I sure don't want to keep breathing when the air is plumb stinking. Let's get a horse and head for your place."

AS THEY rode along, Mary filled in the details of the Jones's activities during the past year. Sloan had some trouble keeping his mind on the problem, because Mary was the prettiest little filley he'd run across. Besides, that, she was chock full of courage.

"And so I'm running the ranch mostly since Tod disappeared. Pa

[Turn To Page 82]

HERE IS THE KIND OF HE-MAN BODY YOU CAN HAVE!

WHAT'S THE SECRET?

You can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back; add inches to your chest, develop a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours powerful, shoot new strength into your backbone, exercise those inner organs, cram your body full of vigor and red-blooded vitality! The new "home gym method" that's the surest and most inexpensive. It has changed many a 90 lb. weakling to a he-man. It has turned many a skinny boy into a marvelous physical specimen. It can do the same for you! **No \$50.00 courses. No expensive gadgets.** You simply use the inexpensive home gym which helps you use the dormant muscle power in your own body. You will watch it increase in double quick time into solid muscle. The home gym method is easy! Only 10 minutes a day in your own home! You can use the home gym method in the morning or at night for no longer than it takes to shave or get dressed—when you use the home gym method you'll be using the method used by many of the greatest athletes, used by football players, wrestlers, fighters and men who keep in trim!

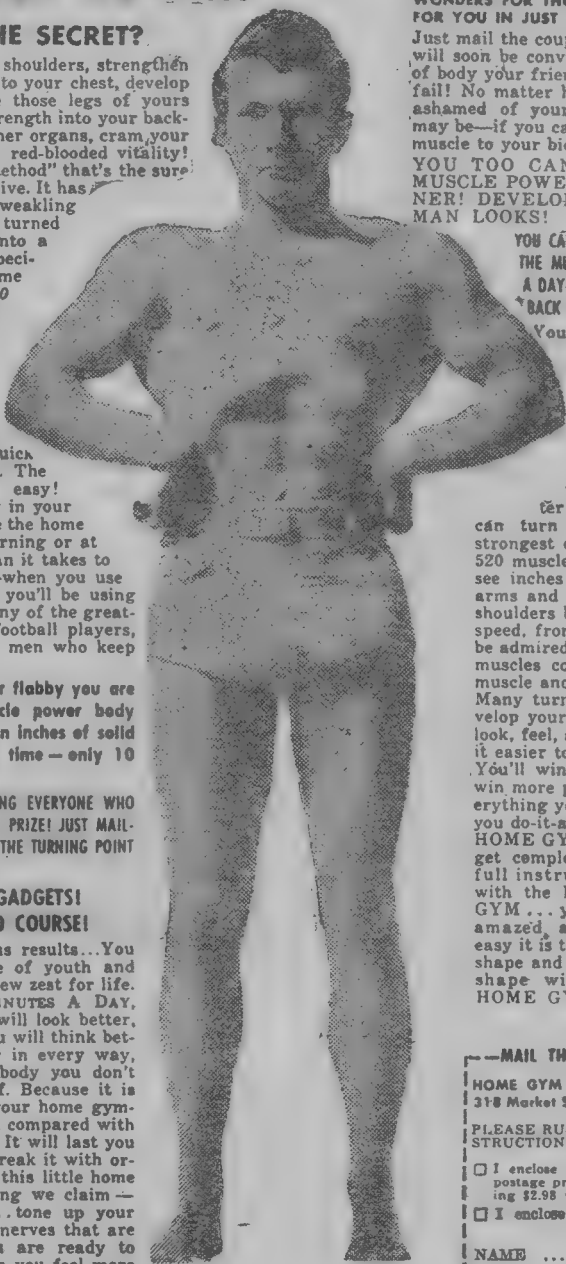
No matter how skinny or flabby you are the amazing new muscle power body builder can help you gain inches of solid muscle in double quick time—only 10 minutes a day!

THE HOME GYM IS SOMETHING EVERYONE WHO WANTS A BETTER BUILD WILL PRIZE! JUST MAILING THE COUPON MAY MEAN THE TURNING POINT IN YOUR LIFE!

NO EXPENSIVE GADGETS!

NO \$30 TO \$100 COURSE!

You will get miraculous results... You will keep that sparkle of youth and you will experience a new zest for life. All it needs is 10 MINUTES A DAY, only 10 minutes. You will look better, you will feel better, you will think better, you will be better in every way, and you will have a body you don't have to be ashamed of. Because it is so simple the cost of your home gymnasium is trivial, when compared with what it can do for you. It will last you a lifetime. You can't break it with ordinary use. Remember this little home gym must do everything we claim—circulate your blood... tone up your muscles—relax those nerves that are so keyed up that you are ready to scream—it must make you feel more pep and vitality than you ever had in your life. It must work or it doesn't cost you a penny. Full price only \$2.98. **SOLD ON A MONEY BACK GUARANTEE—ONLY \$2.98. MAIL COUPON NOW!**



YOU MAIL THE COUPON BELOW AND YOU CAN PROVE TO YOURSELF YOU CAN BE A NEW MAN! THE SECRET METHOD CALLED THE "HOME GYM METHOD" HAS DONE WONDERS FOR THOUSANDS. HERE'S WHAT IT WILL DO FOR YOU IN JUST 10 MINUTES A DAY!

Just mail the coupon below, then in 10 minutes you will soon be convinced that you can have the kind of body your friends admire—there's no cost if you fail! No matter how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be—if you can flex your arm you can add solid muscle to your biceps in amazingly quick time!

YOU TOO CAN BE TOUGH! GAIN REAL MUSCLE POWER! BE AN ALL AROUND WINNER! DEVELOP NEW STRENGTH AND HE MAN LOOKS!

YOU CAN BROADEN YOUR SHOULDERS—STRENGTHEN THE MUSCLES THAT COUNT, IN ONLY 10 MINUTES A DAY—RIGHT IN YOUR OWN HOME—YOUR MONEY BACK IF YOU FAIL!

You can gain handsome power packed muscles all over! Improve your he-man looks 1000%. You can win new strength for money-making work! For winning at all sports! You'll be admired by everyone! You'll turn your old skeleton, frame into a he-man body. You'll be on the road to being big and strong! No matter how skinny or flabby you are you can turn yourself from a wreck to the strongest of strong... You can develop your 520 muscles and gain confidence... you will see inches of mighty muscle added to your arms and chest... you'll see your back and shoulders broadened, you'll gain size, power, speed, from your head to your toes... You'll be admired by all... You'll be a winner where muscles count! Many gain up to 60 lbs. of muscle and add inches to chest and arms... Many turn fat into muscles... You can develop your back, your grip, your legs—you'll look, feel, act like a real he-man. You'll find it easier to win women and men friends... You'll win in sports, win promotion, you'll win more praise and popularity! You get everything you need in one compact package... you do-it-all in just 10 minutes a day, with the HOME GYM. You get complete and full instructions with the HOME GYM... you'll be amazed, at how easy it is to get in shape and stay in shape with the HOME GYM



WIN A SILVER CUP
Awarded to Users Making
Greatest Improvement in
Next 3 Months.

—MAIL THIS NO-RISK COUPON TODAY—

HOME GYM CO., DEPT. 81
318 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey

PLEASE RUSH THE HOME GYM WITH FULL INSTRUCTIONS FOR ONLY \$2.98 complete!

- ☐ I enclose \$2.98 cash, check or money order, send postage prepaid (I save up to 90¢ postage by sending \$2.98 with my order).
- ☐ I enclose \$3.98, send Deluxe Model.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY ZONE STATE.....
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!

wants to help, but he's mostly too old."

"Can't you hire some cowhands?"

"No. The Jones' pay higher wages than anybody else around here can afford, so you can't blame the hands for working for them."

Sloan's chin firmed. "I sure can blame them." His eyes narrowed. "Got any idea what happened to Tod?"

Tears came to her eyes, but she lifted her chin. "I don't know; but if he's still living, I'll find him."

"I reckon he's living all right. Otherwise, the Jones's would have left his body so folks could see it and scare themselves to pieces."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, "I guess that's right."

That evening, Sloan said, "I'm going to ride into town tonight. I'll return the horse to the stable and maybe I can pick up some news about Tod."

"Be careful," Mary said, fear in her eyes.

"Now, don't go fretting about me. I'll be back right soon."

At the stable, Lem Anders asked Sloan, "You working for the Bentons?"

Sloan nodded. "News sure does travel fast around these parts."

Lem looked around before answering. "If'n I was you, I wouldn't spread the word around. You might turn up missing like Tod."

Sloan's voice was level. "What happened to him? You got any notion where he's hid out?"

Lem paled. "I wouldn't be knowing nothing, stranger."

Sloan grabbed his shirt and lifted the wiry man off the ground. "But you got a good idea, don't you?"

The man struggled, his feet flailing the air. "I don't know nothing; honest. I was trying to warn you is all."

Sloan tightened his hold. "You're lying; now tell me what you know, or I'll..."

But he didn't finish the sentence. A shot rang out and Lem's contortions stopped. He moaned and sagged in Sloan's hand. Sloan dropped him and

hit dirt as a shot whizzed over his head. He reached and fired, but in the darkness, he knew he had missed. He heard running feet and then the sound faded into nothingness. In a moment, other boots pounded into the stable.

The men looked at Lem and then at Sloan, their eyes glinting like snake's. A tall man with a thatch of white hair stepped forward. "I'm Grant, the sheriff. Reckon I got to lock you up, stranger; we can't have no more shooting around these parts."

"Now, hold up," Sloan said, getting to his feet. "I didn't plug this man. I was talking to him when somebody outside shot him. Took a shot at me too, but missed."

"What's that?" the sheriff leaned forward, holding his hand over his left ear. Then he continued blandly, "I seen you come walking into town today and I says, you was sure a hombre to watch. We don't take to strangers much."



A MAN, whom Sloan recognized as one of the pair who footed him, stepped up to the sheriff. He yelled, "He ain't telling the truth; he's guilty. I seen him shoot Lem in cold blood. Trying to steal a horse, he was."

Sloan's jaw tightened. So this was the way the town was run. Old Grant couldn't hear and he believed what the Jones boys said. Sloan stared at Jones, "You might of seen Lem die," he said, "when you pulled the trigger."

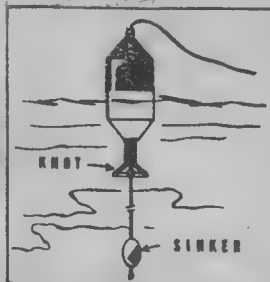
Old Grant boomed, "How's that?" He turned to the other man, "You sure, Jones?"

[Turn To Page 84]

Catch More Fish... AUTOMATICALLY!

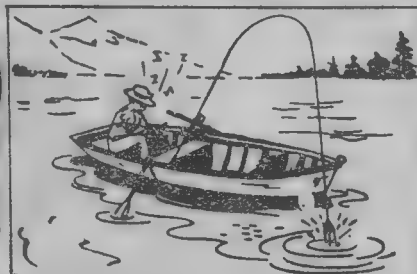
SENSATIONAL BOB-O-MATIC CASTING FLOAT HOOKS
YOUR FISH AUTOMATICALLY THE INSTANT HE BITES

Here's a really clever new invention that now automatically enables you to catch those fish you've been losing. Human reaction is often too slow to set the hook at the right instant, so Bob-O-Matic does it for you automatically. The instant a fish bites—WHAM! the automatic trigger goes to work at lightning speed setting the hook firmly in the mouth of the fish in just 1/50 of a second. **YOUR FISH IS CAUGHT!** Takes only one second to re-set trigger. Fish over and over until you've caught more than you can carry. Don't delay! Order now and really enjoy fishing at its very best. Complete with instructions.



Bob-O-Matic floats upright to show you exactly where the bait is riding and automatically allows the bait to reach the depth you desire.

only
\$1.98



Cast more effectively with Bob-O-Matic than with ordinary floating rigs because the weight is concentrated in one place close to the sinker and the baited hook.

Sensational Features

- Slip line casts more effectively than ordinary float rig.
- Automatically allows bait to reach desired depth.
- Permits reeling fish as close to rod tip as possible.
- May be used as fixed position bobber.
- Sets hook automatically in 1/50 of a second to assure a big catch.

Money Back Guarantee

Bob-O-Matic is guaranteed to catch fish automatically. If you're not 100% delighted, your money will be refunded.

Bob-O-Matic assures you of coming home with the biggest catch and the most admiring glances. You can fish off a boat, a bridge, leave for a drink, or take a nap. Bob-O-Matic does the work for you. It hooks the fish and keeps him hooked.

Money Back Guarantee

SPORTING & TRAPPING Dept. DA-5
Lynbrook, N. Y.

Rush Bob-O-Matic automatic fisher to me at once on 10 day free trial offer at \$1.98

- ☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman on delivery plus a few cents postage.
☐ I enclose payment. Sportsman's Post will pay postage.

Name

Address

Jones put his mouth to Grant's ear. "Reckon he's the curly wolf what did away with Tod. Stranger and horse thief."

Hate sprang into the sheriff's eyes. Sloan had enough. He lunged at Jones, who went down sputtering. Out of the corner of his eye, Sloan saw the other Jones brother reach for his gun, but Old Grant had sharp eyes. He waved his gun in that direction and the gun slid back into Jones' holster.

Sloan slugged Jones, who suddenly threw up his knees. Sloan fell backward. Jones was on his feet, holding a quirt and beat Sloan across the face. He squirmed to his stomach, feeling leather burning into his flesh. With effort, he pushed himself to his feet and whirled in one motion. Sloan grabbed Jones' quirt hand and pounded his fists into his face. Then there was no one receiving Sloan's powerful blows. He looked down to the ground where Jones was sprawled out, his face spurting blood.

Old Grant put a hand on Sloan's arm. "You fight clean, stranger. Come along, now; you can cool off in the hoosgow."

In the cell, Sloan had plenty of time for thinking. He sure wasn't going to be any help to Mary as long as he was locked up. And it wasn't likely that he could explain to the sheriff with his deafness.

Now if he could get word to Mary to explain his doings in these parts to Grant, things would be set-up fine. But there wasn't much chance of that. Folks

were too scared of the Jones' brothers to stick their necks out for a stranger.

Sloan sat on the floor and leaned his head against the wall. He got the make-ings out of his shirt pocket and rolled a cigaret. He struck a match, lighted his cigaret and inhaled deeply. He held the match until the flame flickered and finally snuffed out.

The next morning, he heard light steps in the sheriff's office. "Mr. Grant, you've got to let Sloan free," Mary yelled. "He's our new cowhand."

"What's that?"

"Wait. I'll write it."

Sloan stood up, impatiently waiting for Jacks to unlock the door and let him out. Then he slumped.

"Why Mary," Grant's voice was patient, "I can't go letting you pick up strange men in saloons to help on the ranch. You're out there all alone with just your old pa. No telling what kind of man would come walking into town."

"I told you!" she yelled. "The Jones brothers..."

"Can't hear nothing you say, Mary." The sheriff came to the cell door. "This here man killed last night, Mary. Killed Lem Anders, he did."

"I didn't," Sloan said. "Like I told you, I was talking to him, when..."

Mary stepped closer. "What were you talking about?"

"Tod. Lem knew something and I was trying to get him to tell me when he leaned against a bullet shot out of the dark."

{Turn To Page 86}

WHAT THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY SEAL MEANS



This SEAL OF APPROVAL appears only on comic magazines which have been carefully reviewed, prior to publication, by the Comics Code Authority, and found to have met the high standards of morality and good taste required by the Code. The Code Authority operates apart from any individual publishers and exercises independent judgement with respect to Code-compliance. A comic magazine bearing its Seal is your assurance of good reading and pictorial matter.

FIGURE SLIMMER

NOW OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME

THE NEW FIGURE SLIMMER COMBINATION ADJUSTABLE WAIST AND ABDOMINAL LEVELER

Now reduce that waist and abdominal bulging look instantly. Figure Slimmer pushes back in the droopy bulging abdominal protuberance and lets you take in your waistline and do away with flabby midriff look instantly. Look at the picture and see how it works.

SLINDERIZES BOTH ABDOMEN AND WAIST

Figure-Slimmer corrects the faults of other garments. Some hold in the stomach but push out the waist. Figure Slimmer slenderizes both the waist and abdominal appearance at the same time. You will look inches slimmer and feel wonderful.

HOLDS BACK TOGETHER

Figure Slimmer is wonderful for that falling-apart back feeling. It's firm, gentle compressing action makes you feel good and secure and enables you to continue to do your daily work feeling less tired, less broken down. Send for Figure Slimmer now and begin enjoying a figure-slimmed appearance at once.

APPEAR INCHES SLIMMER—LOOK BETTER

Don't let a heavy weighing-down "corporation" and a balloon waistline get you down. Figure Slimmer flattens your front and takes in inches of your appearance. Clothes will look well on you now!

ADJUSTABLE

Figure Slimmer's adjustable feature makes it easy for you to have a small waistline look. Trousers now look good and fit swell. You can take yourself in more inches if you wish, with this novel adjustable feature.

**TRY 10 DAYS
SEND NO MONEY**



WARD GREEN COMPANY, Dept. P-853
43 West 61 St., N. Y. 23, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

Rush for ten days approval the new Figure Slimmer. After wearing for ten days I can return it for full refund of purchase price if not completely satisfied with results.

Check one:

- ☐ Send C.O.D. and I will pay postman plus postage.
☐ I enclose \$3.49. Send it prepaid. (\$3.98 for waist sizes 46 and up.)
EXTRA crotch pieces—50¢ ea.


My waist measure is.....inches

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....ZONE.....STATE.....

READING GLASSES
FOR PEOPLE OVER 40
SEE FUZZY PRINT



ONLY \$2.95

YOU GET THE FINEST LENSES AND SAVE UP TO \$12 or more

You will bless the day you read this ad!!! No longer need you strain or squint to read small type. **CLEARVISION MAGNIFYING SPECTACLES** give you lenses where they are most effective and convenient. Small type you could hardly read will jump up clear and large. Now you can read fine bible print, find telephone numbers and read newspapers with ease never before possible.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE — YOU RISK NOTHING

CLEARVISION READING GLASSES use precision ground and polished lenses. You could pay up to \$18.00 for glasses and not get greater effectiveness or satisfaction. Set in attractive shock-resistant optical frames designed for years of service and they cost you complete only \$2.95.

SEND NO MONEY — 30 DAY FREE TRIAL

Order today. Send your name, address, age and sex. We will rush your **CLEARVISION READING GLASSES** to you C.O.D. You pay postman \$2.95 plus a few cents C.O.D. postage. If you are not completely satisfied just return. We will refund the full purchase price promptly. Save C.O.D. charges. Send \$2.95 and we pay all shipping charges. Same guarantee.

NULIFE PRODUCTS Dept. 315 1702 Pine Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

She turned. "Sheriff, can't you see he didn't do it? It was..."

Grant's eyes hardened. "He done it all right; now ride along home and leave me to my business."

Mary looked at Sloan. "I'm sorry I asked you to stay here. I know you didn't kill Lem, but..."

Sloan's eyes were steady. "I sure appreciate that, but I'd feel a whole heap better about things if I was out of here."

THAT NIGHT, Sloan was looking out of the cell window when he saw figures riding down main street. All the town folks were in bed and asleep and there were no flickering lights. He watched the masked men dismount, look up and down the street, then knock on the bank's door.

Sloan pounded the floor, knowing

that Grant would get the vibrations better than he could hear voices. The sheriff came in, pulling on his pants. "What's going on here?" he demanded, his eyebrows raising angrily.

Sloan motioned to him to look out of the window.

"No, I ain't," Grant said. "Likely you'd conk me over the head and escape." He turned to go.

Sloan reached out and motioned to another window in the office. The sheriff drooped over to it. He took one look and yelled, "Land almighty they're robbing the bank!"

Sloan nodded.

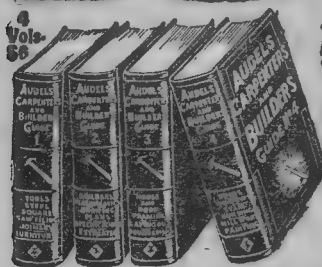
Grant buckled on his gunbelt and, still bootless, ran down the street toward the bank.

Sloan wished he could have gone

[Turn To Page 88]

BUILDERS

TRADE GUIDES



AUDELS CARPENTERS AND BUILDERS GUIDES—4 VOLS. \$6

Inside Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics—all Woodworkers. 1600 pages; 3700 diagrams; flexible; pocket size. Short-cut instructions, new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems—money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. A Helping Hand to Easier and Better Work and Better Pay. To get this aid for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

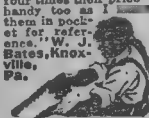
INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

How to use steel square; How to file and set saws; How to build furniture; How to use mitre box; How to use chalk line; How to use rules; How to make joints; Carpenters' arithmetic; Measurement problems; Estimating

strength of timbers; How to set girders and sills; How to frame houses and roofs; How to estimate costs; How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.; How to read and draw plans; Drawing up specifications; How

to excavate; How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square; How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights; How to build stairs; How to put on interior trim; How to hang doors; How to lath—lay floors; How to paint.

"Audels Guides worth four times their price—handy too as I have them in pocket for reference." W. J. Bates, Knoxville, Pa.



AUDELS PLUMBERS AND STEAMFITTERS GUIDES—4 VOLS. \$6

A new edition—just out! A practical, illustrated, Reference Library and Study-Course for Master Plumbers, Journeymen and Apprentice Steamfitters, Gas Fitters and Helpers, Sheet Metal Workers, Draughtsmen, Master Builders, Engineers and all Building Trade Employees. 1676 pages; 3642 diagrams; flexible; pocket size. Guides explain all the principles, advances and short cuts of the Plumbing and Heating trade. Contains information without obligation, this valuable work.

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

Air Conditioning. Soldering, tinning. Joint wiping, bending, beating. Pipe—iron—steel, threading. Mathematical tables, physics. Materials—iron, steel, copper, brass, lead, tin, antimony. Sheet metal—galvanized—plate. Sanita-

tion, cyphonage, tanks. Drainage, sewage, purification. Fixtures—bath—kitchen. Pipe fittings, soil pipe, tools. Laying out work. Roughing. Screwed fittings, flanges, joints. Pipe bending, examples. Elbows. Heating, ven-

tilation, refrigeration. Water supply, mains, wells, tanks. Gas-fittings. Underwriters. Sheet metal work, problems, methods, brazing, heating, lead burning. Welding, various welds, methods. Blacksmithing, forges, tools.

"Audels Guides are practical, easy to understand, reliable. Cover the field in plain language." W. F. Arringer, Annapolis, Md.



AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDES—4 VOLS. \$6

A complete, illustrated trade reference library, for Bricklayers, Cement Workers, Plasterers, Tile Setters and Stone Masons, including a practical outline of Steel Construction. 1100 pages; 2067 diagrams; flexible; pocket size. A practical Trade Assistant explaining modern methods of masonry construction. Easy to understand and apply. A reliable and authentic reference work and study-course for Master Journeyman and Young Mechanic. Use FREE COUPON below and find out for yourself, without obligation, whether this set will benefit you.

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

Bricklaying, tools, materials; Brick designs, patterns, bonds; Setting frames and foundations; Mortars, scaffolds, estimating; Mortars and mortar mixing; Tile setting, mosaic, hollow tile; Straight edge test, trow-

eling; How to figure brick work; Safe loads, piers, chimneys; Boiler settings, anchors, fire stops; Labor tables; Concrete, forms; How to figure concrete work; Stucco—on old and new buildings; Plastering—wood lath—metal;

Plasterers' agreement; Plastering on various surfaces; Stone masonry; Cutting, finishing, estimating stone; Derricks, rigging; Steel construction; Fire proof; How to read blue prints.

"Audels Masons Guides are the best books on the subject. Have laid brick 12 years and amblasto lodge." H. A. Sone, Corlies.



PRACTICAL ELECTRICITY—1 VOL. \$4

Audels Handy Book of Practical Electricity is a simplified Ready Reference and Study Course in one pocket size volume—for Engineers, Professional Electricians and Students. 1640 pages; 2600 diagrams; flexible bound. A reliable authority and handy helper for every electrical worker. Contains important and valuable wiring diagrams, calculations, machine sketches, help on maintenance and repair. Use this FREE COUPON today and find out, without obligation, how this handy book will help you in your daily work.

Complete in one handy, red leather bound volume

INSIDE TRADE INFORMATION ON:

Electro-Therapeutics, X-Rays, Shocks, Welding, Brazing, Radio Hook-ups, Motion Pictures, Telephone, Telegraph, Cranes, Bells, Elevators, Pumps, Tools, Ship Drive, Railways, Vehicles, Automobile Electric Systems, Ignition, Generation, Lighting, Plant Management, Power Motors and Apparatus, D. C. Motors and Apparatus, Alternator Construction, Dynamos, Wiring, Diagrams, Sigm Flashers, Cable Splicing, Power Wiring, Outside Wiring, Switches, Lighting, Rectifiers, Converters, Transformers, Fuses, Circuit Breakers, Rheostats, Electro Plating, Electrolysis, Storage Batteries, Magnetism, Electrical Energy, Conductors, Insulators, Static, Dynamic, Radio Electricity, Applications, Ready Reference and Index. Covering the entire field of Modern Electricity.



Learn More and You Will Earn More!

Know your job and you'll never be without one. The skilled man is always in demand. Knowledge is power. Learn your trade thoroughly by easy reading. This coupon is your opportunity for advancement and better pay. You risk nothing in sending for Audels Guides for free examination. Send it NOW!



THEO. AUDEL & CO.

49 W. 23 ST., NEW YORK CITY

Please mail me for free examination the books marked (x) below. If I find them satisfactory, I agree to mail \$1 in 7 days, on each set ordered, and to further mail \$1 monthly on each set until I have paid the purchase price.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 CARPENTERS GUIDES \$6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 PLUMBERS GUIDES \$6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 MASONS GUIDES \$6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 ELECTRICIANS HANDY BOOK \$4 |

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

OCCUPATION.....

EMPLOYED BY.....DA.



SIMULATED DIAMOND LADIES' ENGAGEMENT and WEDDING RINGS

Only \$1 per set of 2 rings

You'll love these rings—the simulated diamonds look like a "million dollars" and sparkle with many stones. **SEND NO MONEY.** Pay postman only \$1 plus postage for both rings. If you send \$1 cash with order we pay all postage. **GUARANTEE:** Wear rings 10 days. If not pleased return for refund. White or yellow gold color effect or sterling silver mountings.

BOTH RINGS FOR \$1

HAREN CO.

50 Church St., Dept. A-18, New York 7, N. Y.

FREE—Amazing Book on RHEUMATISM, ARTHRITIS

If you suffer aches, pains and discomforts of Rheumatism, as manifested in ARTHRITIS, NEURITIS, SCIATICA or LUMBAGO, send today for this **FREE** Book. It reveals important facts about why drugs and medicine give only temporary relief without removing cause. Explains a proven, specialized system of treatment that may save you years of distress. No obligation. Write for this **FREE** Book today!

BALL CLINIC, DEPT. 62, EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MO.

CABINET MAKING



LOW COST HOME TRAINING COURSE FOR BEGINNERS & ADVANCED CRAFTSMEN

Make money. Learn skills and secrets of fine woodworking and tool use. Professionally prepared shop method training tells and shows how. Covers everything. Easy to master.

INTERSTATE TRAINING SERVICE

Write for Free Booklet

DEPT. F-98

PORTLAND 13, OREGON



SONGWRITERS

COMPLETE SONG WRITING SERVICE

Let us try to help you be a success in this field. Music composed for your words. Records and copies furnished.

GUARANTEED PUBLICATION

We guarantee the publication of at least one song each month by a legitimate B.M.I. music publisher. The writers receive advance royalty and a standard royalty contract. The publisher pays all publication expenses.

WHAT ARE YOUR CHANCES?

If you have ability your chances are good. Now song-writers become famous every year. Maybe this is YOUR year. Publishers are constantly on the lookout for good songs. Turn your material over to a firm whose business is **SONGWRITING**.

WRITE TODAY

SEND YOUR POEM or lyric today for free examination and complete information on our exceptional offer.

Dept. P, 1609 Vista Del Mar, Hollywood 28, California

HOLLYWOOD TUNESMITHS

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

with him, but he knew Jacks wouldn't let him free. He stood tense, watching the bank building.

In a moment Sloan heard a shot. One shot. He waited to hear more. Then he understood as the masked men ran outside, mounted and rode off into the darkness. Sloan started yelling, hoping to awaken some of the town people, but the shot had done the job. They rushed to the bank. Sloan had his back to the door.

"All right," a voice said, unlocking the cell door. "Come along."

Sloan stood motionless. "Sorry. I don't figure on going any place."

"That so?" The masked man held a forty-five pointed at his heart. "Now, get moving."

"Why?" Sloan asked.

No one answered. Sloan moved forward, mounted the horse the man motioned to and without a word, they rode out of town, unnoticed by the mob of people who stood around the bank.

Soon Sloan asked, "The old man. Did you kill him?"

"Sure hope so. He had it coming to him."

Sloan rode on, thinking. Finally, he said, "I reckon you sprung me so's I'd be blamed for the robbery. Why?"

"You're right handy. Folks couldn't blame you if you was locked up. With you broken out, they'll be plumb sure you robbed the bank."

"Yeah. Slick thinking, all right. Why pick on me?"

"Like I said, you're handy."

Sloan nodded, "Where we heading?"

"You'll see. Jest keep riding."

Outside of town, the other riders joined them. They rode along silently. Suddenly Sloan lunged toward the nearest man, knocking him off the horse. The rider plunged to the ground, with Sloan on top of him. The man slapped leather, but Sloan knocked the gun out of his hand, beyond reach of either of them.

[Turn To Page 90]

Now...anything you can see brought up 15 times closer!

From 1 to 50 miles

new, amazing

POWERHOUSE EXTRA LONG RANGE TELESCOPE

- Metal Draw Tubes!
- Extra Sharp!
- Deluxe Model!
- Converts into Microscope!



\$12.95

VALUE

4.99

NOW

**FREE
PORTABLE TRIPOD**

**225 TIMES AREA
MAGNIFICATION**

From this →  to this → 

These two dramatic photos of the Washington Monument prove beyond words the terrific power of this amazing telescope. The tiny photo is as the naked eye sees it miles from the nation's capital. The big picture is what the POWERHOUSE gives you—225 times the area!

**MADE IN GERMANY
by 101 YEAR PLANT**

This extra long range POWERHOUSE TELESCOPE was developed by a reputable German factory. Known for quality products for over 100 years. Not a toy with cardboard tubes! A real optical instrument with heavy-duty METAL draw tubes and PRECISION MADE lenses of amazing power. Every detail reflects German know-how and legendary workmanship.

7 SUPER FEATURES

1. Polished METAL tubes. 2. Smooth focusing. 3. Contoured eyepiece. 4. Interior coated objective lens as in expensive binoculars. 5. Permits viewing even in moonlight. 6. Deluxe quality finish thruout. 7. Converts quickly into a compound microscope! NOW the super power lenses give you greater range and magnification than famous American binoculars selling for up to \$250.00.

**See the new U.S.
NAVY Man-Made
Moons!**



The U.S. Department of Defense will soon launch ten midjet moons into space. They will circle the Earth in orbits up to 800 miles away. Your POWERHOUSE telescope can bring these satellites within 20 miles. Read announcements in your newspaper. Be one of the first to observe the flight of these spectacular little worlds that may change the course of history! The thrill of a lifetime awaits you with your new long-range POWERHOUSE.

**POWERFUL LENSES REACH
OUT INTO OUTER SPACE**

Miles melt away. 15 miles become only one. Anything your eye can see—even celestial bodies—are brought closer. They look bigger, clearer, sharper. Observe the moon and its changing phases. Search the skies for the new man-made satellites being launched by the U.S. Navy. Try it on distant buildings, people, ships at sea, sports, airplanes, birds and wild animals—WITHOUT BEING SEEN.

BUY DIRECT & SAVE

Buy direct from importer! Reg. 12.95 value—yours for 4.99, with Table Tripod & dust protector. Send only 4.99 Cash, m.o. or check for prompt delivery. (COD's plus postage extra). Satisfaction GUARANTEED or your 4.99 back. Have fun! Have thrills! Order TODAY!

THORESEN'S, Dept. 120-G-43

352 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.

CANADIANS: Order direct from Thoresen's, Dept. US-43, 45 St. James St. West, Montreal 1, P. Q.

MAIL TODAY

**THORESEN'S, Dept. 120-G-43
352 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.**

RUSH POWERHOUSE TELESCOPES and Free Tripod at cut price of 4.99 each, on 7 day trial, money back guarantee.
☐ Check, cash, or m.o. herewith. RUSH prepaid.
☐ Send C.O.D. plus postage rest.

Name

Address

Town State



IMITATION

DIAMOND RING

\$1.49 each or both for **\$2.49**

Gorgeous Solitaire and Wedding Ring set with Beautiful Imitation diamonds in 1/30 14 Kt. Yellow Gold Plated or Sterling Silver or White Gold Color Effect on a **MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.** SEND NO MONEY. Pay Postman on delivery plus postal charges. If you send cash or money order with order, we pay postage.

HAREM CO., "The House of Rings," 30 Church St., Dept. C43, New York 7, N. Y.

Shrinks Hemorrhoids New Way Without Surgery

Science Finds Healing Substance That Relieves Pain—Shrinks Hemorrhoids

For the first time science has found a new healing substance with the astonishing ability to shrink hemorrhoids and to relieve pain — without surgery.

In case after case, while gently relieving pain, actual reduction (shrinkage) took place.

Most amazing of all — results were so thorough that sufferers made astonishing statements like "Piles have ceased to be a problem!"

The secret is a new healing substance (Bio-Dyne*) — discovery of a world-famous research institute.

This substance is now available in suppository or ointment form under the name *Preparation H.** Ask for it at all drug counters — money back guarantee. *Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA



You can earn a High School Diploma in your own home! Prepare yourself for a better job and more pay. Study in your spare time... No classes... all materials furnished. Certified teachers. Valuable diploma awarded.

WRITE TODAY FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION
SOUTHERN STATES ACADEMY
Box 144 - GA. Sta. E, Atlanta, Georgia

POEMS WANTED

TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Send one or more of your best poems today for **FREE EXAMINATION.** Any subject. Immediate Consideration.

Phonograph Records Made
CROWN MUSIC CO., 1486-F Broadway, N. Y. 36, N. Y.

POWER

"Like Yoga-hypnotism-telepathy-psychology—COMBINED" **PSYCHIC DOMINANCE.** Rule others with thoughts.—\$2 **ART OF USING YOUR PRIMITIVE AUTO-CONSCIOUS**—\$2 **THE SECRETS OF PSYCHIC POWER PROJECTION**—\$2.50 **PSYCHIC OCCULT HEALING.** Miraculous power.—\$1.50 **LIMITED OFFER: All 4—\$7.00 (Adults).** No COD's **DELMAR WISDOM, 846-D7 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago 46, Ill.**

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

Then he was surrounded by the others. He blacked out when he felt a gun barrel beat across the back of his head. He groaned, then collapsed on the ground.

HE BLINKED his eyes against the blazing sun, which beat down on him through a window. Throwing his arm over his face, he rolled over to his stomach.

"Howdy," a man's voice broke the silence. "Didn't figure on seeing you here. If'n it was Dodge City..."

With an effort, Sloan opened his eyes. Then he sat up, ignoring the blinding headache. "Tod," Sloan said. "So you're sitting it out here while Mary is worrying herself sick."

Tod's thin lips turned up at the corners. For the first time, Sloan noticed the close-set eyes, which never exactly focused on his. "He's weak," Sloan realized with surprise.

"I'm living, this way," Tod said nervously. "Besides, like I've been telling Mary. We might as well sell out to the Jones'. They'll get our land one way or the other. Why fight it?"

Sloan clamped his jaws together and his eyes narrowed. "You haven't sold out to them, have you?"

Tod's laugh was shaky. "I offered, but they said there was an easier way now without them paying. It sure burns me up. They're planning to work on Mary. They know she and Pa can't run the place alone, so they're just setting by waiting for her to holler calf."

"She won't!" Sloan said bitterly. "She's got more grit in her gizzard than you'll ever have. She'll hold on someway."

Tod rolled a smoke. "I don't reckon she can last much longer. The Jones's sure are slick. They figure with you out of the way that they can corner Mary. Say, to free me she can sell out to them—low."

"It figures," Sloan said slowly. He got to his feet and carefully rubbed his
[Turn To Page 92]

JUST OUT!

the First Book
of its kind
ever Published

HYPNOTISM

for Professionals

by Konradi Leitner

A book that goes beyond the mere demonstration of the technique of hypnotizing. Now for the first time the real secrets of hypnotism are revealed. The mental processes of both hypnotist and subject are based so that the student can understand what really goes on.

Leitner explains not only how to hypnotize but the reason for every act, gesture and spoken word. The student no longer need imitate blindly but really know and understand why!

SPECIAL FEATURE! MEDICAL HYPNOTISM!

A full chapter is devoted to a demonstration of how hypnotism is used as a therapeutic device.

Actual case histories showing how hypnotism is used as an aid in overcoming difficulties arising from psychological causes are given.

Contents:

The State of Trance
Matters of Degree
Some Are More Suggestible
Asleep, or Not Asleep
The Cataleptic Test
The Reluctant Subject
No Rude Awakening
Illusions, Unlimited
Memory Lane
After the Trance is Over
For Experts Only

Induction Among Friends

Establishing Rapport
The Light Trance
The Doubting Subject
Removing the Doubt
The Overanxious Subject
A Young Subject
An Aid to Education
The Deep Trance
Detective Work
Self Hypnotism

On Stage

The Opening Speech
The Audience Is With You
The Invisible Cord
The Critical Point
The Chosen Few
Confidence and Control
Effective Performance
Ending the Show
Stage Hypnotism Photographically Illustrated

If Mesmer Could Have Known!

From Cult to Craft

Scorn's End
Hypnotism Today ... and Tomorrow

ILLUSTRATED WITH MANY FULL-PAGE "HOW TO" PHOTOGRAPHS

It's easy to follow these instructions

A Few Quotes From Important Publications

The American Journal of the Medical Sciences

Interesting and frank discussion of hypnotism as it is carried out by a professional hypnotist. The presentation of material and the suggestions offered are conservative and dignified. The conciseness of the "how to do it" technique is commendable.

THE SAN FRANCISCO PROGRESS

Hypnotism is neither mysterious nor remote, but an instrument which may one day serve you. Enchanting photos, too.

RETAIL BOOKSELLER

The science of hypnotism explained in detail. The author, a professional hypnotist, shows the scientific value of hypnotism.

Full-page photographs and a glossary of terms.

LOS ANGELES EXAMINER

Step-by-step explanation of techniques of stage and therapeutic hypnotism by a practitioner of the former. Most valuable bibliography.

JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Clear and interesting.

MAIL TODAY

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY
OFFER COUPON
for limited time only

ONLY \$2.49
REGULAR \$4.00
PRICE 4.

Offer valid only if sent on this coupon . . . MAIL TODAY!

STRAYON PUBLISHERS DEPT. HP-597
43 West 61 Street, N. Y. 23, N. Y.

Yes I want to take advantage of the special 40% discount offer. Send me Hypnotism for Professionals for 10 days free examination.

☐ Send C.O.D. I'll pay postman \$2.49 (not \$4.00) plus postage.

☐ I enclose \$2.49 (not \$4.00) Strayon pays postage. I'll get my purchase price refunded if not 100% satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

MEDICAL TABLET DISCOVERY
NEW EFFECTIVE TREATMENT
PSORIASIS
TROPISAN
New Hope for CRUSTS, SCALES
No Mossy Oils—Simple, Easy, SAFE TABLET!

Say goodbye to smelly, greasy oils and salves. TROPISAN, newly discovered medical tablet, gives welcome relief from itchy scales, patches and other external symptoms of Psoriasis. TROPISAN strikes at the internal source—not just the surface symptoms. Absolutely safe, fast, easy to take. No mess, no fuss, no unsightly bandages to mar work or play. TROPISAN—the proven "effective treatment." Every reported case stated that TROPISAN relieved symptoms to some degree with continuous use. Send \$1.00 today for Trial Offer. Address, **TROPISAN DRUG CO., Dept. 115**
 2630 E. 75th St., Chicago 49, Ill.

RHEUMATISM

Don't suffer another day with painful Rheumatism. Famous English doctor offers new hope to thousands! Dr. Russell Sneddon reveals startling **NEW SYSTEM** of home treatment in his "NATURE CURE FOR RHEUMATIC AFFECTIONS." RESULTS GUARANTEED if you follow Dr. Sneddon's simple instructions. Postpaid only \$1.00.

NEW LIFE, Dept. DA, ROWAN, IOWA

MODEL BEAUTY

DEVELOPER

MAY INCREASE YOUR

CHESTLINE

MEASUREMENTS

without changing THE CONTOUR. The model beauty developer tends to develop the chest muscles and other muscles. You become more attractive! Helps develop, tone and firm the underlying muscles which are important to make you more attractive! With a larger chest measurement you too may appear more attractive, youthful. This new model beauty developer if used as directed must do everything we promise or you get your money back. Many have



achieved an increased chest measurement. If it doesn't do the same for you—Return it for full refund! The model beauty developer is used in the privacy of your own home. . . It is sent to you in plain wrapper with full instructions. Don't delay! Act Today! For Model Beauty Developer in Plain wrapper send \$2.98 cash, check or money order or \$3.98 for Deluxe Model to:

BEAUTYAIDS COMPANY, DEPT. 126
318 MARKET STREET, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

BEAUTYAIDS COMPANY, DEPT. 126
 318 MARKET STREET
 NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

- ☐ I enclose \$2.98. Send the BEAUTY DEVELOPER in plain wrapper—on money back guarantee. (I save up to 90c postage by sending payment with order.)
☐ I enclose \$3.98. Send Deluxe Model.

Name
 Address
 City State

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

head. Then he whirled on Tod. "And you're sitting here safe and comfortable while they're snaking around her. Haven't you got any guts; any sense of what's right? Let's get moving!"

Tod's lips quivered. "Now, Sloan don't get het-up. We don't have a chance to escape. Take a look-see out of the window. There's the gang always milling around. Why, I ain't planning on getting a window blown through me. I..."

"You know this country, I suppose. Just where are we?"

"Why, it's real handy, this hideout is. Not more'n three miles from town, and our place is down the breaks four or five miles."

SLOAN calculated rapidly. "Our best bet would be to get back to town where we could round up a posse. How many men stay here when the gang rides out?"

"A couple. But they're big and they got plenty of artillery and..."

"This roof," Sloan said musingly, as he reached up and dug his fingers in it, "isn't anything but mud." He got out his pocket knife and stuck it in the blade's length, turning it about. A shower of dirt fell on his head. He grinned. "We can escape. Tod; real easy."

Tod's eyes squinted at the hole in the ceiling. "Jest getting out of here ain't going to save us. We still got to get horses, and dodge lead, and..." He shook his head. "I ain't going to do it; it ain't what I'd call healthy."

"You'll do it," Sloan said grimly, working at the roof, "or you'll have me gunning for you." Sloan leveled his knife on Tod and walked toward him.

Tod flattened himself against the wall, his eyes running wildly around. "I'll do it, Sloan; sure, I will. I was just thinking what was best."

Sloan's smile was icy. "I thought you'd see the light."

When darkness settled over the hide-

CONDEMNED HERO

out, Sloan had a hole in the roof big enough to wiggle through. He hitched himself up and stuck his head outside. The camp had settled down and there were no lights. One man dozed outside the lean-to. Sloan pulled out, careful to make no sound. A bit of dirt fell and the man jerked awake. Sloan flattened himself on the roof. The man looked around, then his chin returned to his chest. In a few minutes, he was snoring.

Sloan inched himself to the back of the lean-to, then dropped to the ground. Creeping around, he jumped the guard, putting his left hand over the man's mouth. With his right fist, he knocked the man unconscious. He strapped his belt around the man's ankles, then took off the man's belt and strapped his arms behind him. Lastly, he gagged him with a handkerchief. Then he took his gun and keys. Opening the lean-to door, he motioned Tod to follow quietly.

They ran, doubled over, to the corral. Opening the gate, Sloan grabbed two horses, then left the gate open. After Tod and he mounted bareback, he slapped one of the milling horses on the flank. As he and Tod rode off, he heard the freed horses' hooves pounding out of the corral.

He heard the camp come to life. He grinned. The commotion was fine. And then there were shots. Sloan paused. "You ride on to town, Tod. Send help. I'll cover you."

"Yeah," Tod said, leaning forward on his mount.

Sloan sent a couple of shots back, then rode in a round-about way toward town to give Tod time to get help. He relaxed. He heard no horses coming his way.

AS HE neared town, Sloan was surprised to see no movement. And then he knew. Tod had not come to town. He was riding off alone to safety, thinking of no one but himself.

Sloan stopped at the hoosgow. He dismounted and knocked on the door.

[Turn Page]

To People who want to write but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what a famous editor said on this subject:

"There is more room for newcomers in the writing field today than ever before. Some of the greatest of writing men and women have passed from the scene. Who will take their places? Fame, riches and the happiness of achievement await the new men and women of power."



N. I. A. GETS YOUNG WRITER STARTED EARNING MONEY

"I sold two short stories which paid for my N.I.A. Course and a typewriter. But nothing can pay for the help N.I.A. training has given me in overcoming the inertia which sits down with me at my typewriter. Those regular assignments have produced results."

—Samuel K. Ward, 364 W. 26th St., New York, N.Y.

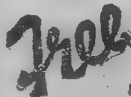
Writing Aptitude Test — FREE!

THE Newspaper Institute of America offers a FREE Writing Aptitude Test. Its object is to discover new recruits for the army of men and women who add to their income by fiction and article writing. The Writing Aptitude Test is a simple but expert analysis of your latent ability, your powers of imagination, logic, etc. Not all applicants pass this test. Those who do are qualified to take the famous N. I. A. course based on the practical training given by big metropolitan dailies.

This is the New York Copy Desk Method which teaches you to write by writing. You develop your individual style instead of trying to copy that of others. Although you work at home, on your own time, you are constantly guided by experienced writers. You "cover" actual assignments such as metropolitan reporters get. It is really fascinating work. Each week you see new progress. In a matter of months you can acquire the coveted "professional" touch. Then you are ready for market with greatly improved chances of making sales.

Mail the Coupon NOW

But the first step is to take the FREE Writing Aptitude Test. It requires but a few minutes and costs nothing. So mail the coupon now. Make the first move towards the most enjoyable and profitable occupation — writing for publication! Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Ave., New York 16, N.Y. (Founded 1925) Licensed by State of New York. (Approved Member National Home Study Council)



Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Ave., New York 16, N.Y.

Send me without cost or obligation,
your free Writing Aptitude Test and further
information about writing for profit.

Mrs. _____

Mr. _____

Miss _____

Address _____

City _____

Zone _____

State _____

(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.)

☐ Check here if Veteran.

61-P-886

Copyright 1953 Newspaper Institute of America.



Troubled with SETTING UP NIGHTS, Pains in BACK, HIPS, LEGS, Tiredness, Loss of Physical Vigor

If you have these symptoms then your troubles may be traced to Glandular Dysfunction... a constitutional disease. Medicines that give temporary relief will not remove the cause of your trouble. Neglect of Glandular Dysfunction often leads to premature old age and sometimes incurable malignancy.

The past few years men from over 3,000 communities have been successfully treated here at the Excelsior Institute. They have found soothing relief and new zest in life.

The Excelsior Institute, devoted to the treatment of diseases peculiar to older men by NON-SURGICAL methods has a NEW FREE BOOK that tells how Glandular Dysfunction may be corrected by proven NON-SURGICAL treatments. This book may prove of utmost importance in your life. Write today. There is no obligation. Excelsior Institute, Dept 4934, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

HIGH PAYING OPPORTUNITIES

Work in fabulous So. America, The Islands, Africa, U. S. A., or other foreign countries. All Trades, Labor, Clerical, Drivers, Mechanics, Engineers, etc. Many benefits. Tax-free earnings. Chance to travel. Fare paid if hired. Make and save a fortune. Application forms. Opportunities for women also.

For Information Write Dept. 95H
NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION
1020 Broad, Newark, N. J.

SONGS = \$\$\$\$\$\$

Share \$29 million yearly. Songs Composed, PUBLISHED, promoted. Appraisal, Info FREE. Send to
NORDYKE PUBLISHING CO.
6000 SUNSET BLVD., Hollywood 28 DA, Cal.

Unsurpassed Comfort With Improved RUPTURE ★ RELIEVER



DOUBLE
only

\$4.95



Right
or Left

\$4.95

NO FITTING REQUIRED

ADJUSTABLE FOR YOUR COMFORT

AT LAST A NEW FORM-FITTING WASHABLE BRACER WITH ADJUSTABLE LEG-STRAPS THAT'S GUARANTEED TO BE THE MOST COMFORTABLE YOU EVER WORE! NO SNAPS, NO LACES, NO STEEL. Amazing new kind of flat groin pad for support with complete comfort. BEST TOO AS AFTER OPERATION SUPPORT. Order by MAIL.
☐ RIGHT SIDE \$4.95. ☐ LEFT SIDE \$4.95.
☐ DOUBLE \$4.95. Measurement around LOWEST PART OF ABDOMEN IN INCHES IS: inches. SENT ON APPROVAL. AVOID SERIOUS DELAY. • SOLD ON MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

WRIGHT BRACER CO.

Dept. 154, 318 Market St., Newark, New Jersey

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

Old Grant lumbered to the door in his long-handles with his gunbelt fastened around his hips. Sloan noticed the bandage on his left shoulder. So Grant had only been winged by the bullet when they robbed the bank.

"Yeah?" Old Grant asked, peering out. Then his mouth sagged open. "It's you, is it? Thought you was real slick the way you rigged that robbery. Well, I'm on to your tricks now. I..."

Sloan stepped inside and closed the door behind him. "Listen, sheriff. There's no time for talking."

Grant's gun was out. "Step along now, Sloan; I got to lock you up. Murder and robbery it is now.

Impatiently, before Grant knew what was happening, Sloan knocked the gun from his hand. "Listen to me," he yelled. Then he picked up a pencil and paper. He wrote quickly and held it toward Grant.

"I ain't believing you none."

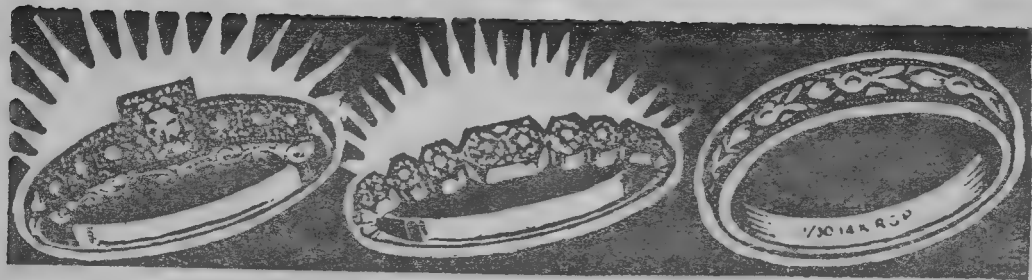
Sloan heard horses' hooves coming closer. He wrote, "The Jones gang is coming. Better call a posse quick."

Old Grant's eyes searched Sloan's face, then he nodded. "I reckon you're levelling. Otherwise, you wouldn't be loco enough to come busting in here when you could of rode out of the country." He pulled open a drawer and put a whistle in his mouth. Before Sloan got the meaning, the whistle split the still air. Lights flashed on in houses. In several minutes, men filled the small sheriff's office.

Grant, meantime, had dressed. He said, "The Jones's is coming. We ain't been able to do nothing about them alone—been too scared, but now we ain't. Sloan, here, is going to lead us and we're going to lock every blasted one of them up. And then we'll tote them to Dodge City, and..."

The men mumbled, eyeing Sloan. "I'll explain later," Sloan said. "Cover all the windows and don't let them get away." He turned. "Need a couple of volunteers too."

[Turn To Page 96]



STYLE A. Engagement Ring with a 1 kt. imported simulated diamond.

STYLE B. Wedding Ring with many simulated imported Diamonds.

STYLE C. Wedding Band Plain or Embossed.

SIMULATED DIAMONDS IMPORTED

To make thousands of new friends we offer you choice of any ring shown. Any style in white or yellow gold color effect or Sterling Silver. Just select style ring, send together with this ad—name, address, ring size and 50c coin or money order. **ACT NOW!** Guarantee: 10 Day Money Back If Not Satisfied.

ONLY
50c

EA.

POSTPAID
Nothing More
to Pay—Ever!

SIMMONS CO., 849 Church St. Annex
Dept. F-1992 New York 8, N. Y.

LUCKY LODESTONES?



MAGNETIC LODESTONES are truly LEGENDARY as the ancient Romans and Greeks used them in BIBLICAL TIMES and thought that MAGNETIC LODESTONES were cloaked with MAGICAL and SUPERNATURAL POWERS. We offer our LEGENDARY BRAND pair of highly MAGNETIC LODESTONES, the same type that the ANCIENTS may have used. Our LEGENDARY BRAND of highly MAGNETIC LODESTONES come to you in a red flannel bag, together with a so-called Talismanic Seal of LUCK No. 20, as shown in the 6th and 7th BOOK of MOSES by Louis de Claremont. All FOUR items for only \$2.00 postpaid or \$2.50 C.O.D. We make no claims and sell them only as curios.

LEGENDARY CO., 125 BROAD ST.
Dept. 222-C, New York 4, N. Y.

God WANTS YOU

To Be Really Happy! Are you facing difficult Problems? Poor Health? Money or Job Troubles? Love or Family Troubles? Are you Worried about someone dear to you? Is someone dear to you Drinking too Much? Do you ever get Lonely—Unhappy—Discouraged. Would you like to have more Happiness, Success and "Good Fortune" in Life?

If you have any of these Problems, or others like them, dear friend, then here is wonderful NEWS—News of a remarkable NEW WAY of PRAYER that is helping thousands to glorious NEW happiness and joy! Whether you believe in PRAYER or not, this remarkable NEW WAY may bring a whole NEW world of happiness and joy to you—and very, very quickly, too!

So don't wait, dear friend. You will surely bless this day—so please don't delay! Just clip this Message now and mail with your name, address, and 3¢ stamp to **LIFE-STUDY FELLOWSHIP, Box 5010, Noroton, Conn.** We will rush this wonderful NEW Message of PRAYER and FAITH to you by AIR MAIL absolutely FREE!



GIRLS

**GET YOUR
MAN**

and make him yours FOREVER. Why take chances against other women who may be using mysterious charms? Here is your

chance to learn and use Secrets of Sex Appeal so powerful that even bad women can keep good men while good girls go without.

HOW TO WIN AND HOLD A HUSBAND

contains the very essence of confidential advice that a great Love and Marriage Expert has given to thousands of women—all reduced to a simple set of rules—an easy formula that you can learn to use to WIN YOUR MAN, and on delivery deposit only \$2 plus postage with your postman. (Or send \$2 with order to save C.O.D. and that you will be more than delighted or your money back promptly and no questions asked. Order At Once.

LARCH, 118 East 28, Dept. 441-G, N. Y. 16

ADD

Essential For—
SCHOOL
BUSINESS
HOME-SHOP
FACTORY
OFFICE

**MULTIPLY
CALCULATE
at a glance!**

RAPID-FIRE CALCULATOR for vast number combinations — and fractions, too.
SAVES HOURS of tedious figuring. **GUARANTEED ACCURATE.** **QUICK ANSWERS GET YOU AHEAD FASTER!**

Stop wasting precious time figuring. Now even a School-boy can get 100% accurate answers at a Glance!

A PERMANENT CALCULATOR — ONLY 50c
ORDER NOW on MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!

WEBMAN BROS., Dept. DA 712 B'way, N.Y. 3, N. Y.

I Learned SHORTHAND IN 6 WEEKS

with **Speedwriting**

No Symbols — No Machines
Uses A B C's

by Otto Lehwald

Minneapolis, Minnesota

"Because of my age, I was discouraged from studying shorthand. I answered a SPEEDWRITING shorthand ad and enrolled. The Course took me several weeks to complete. SPEEDWRITING shorthand can be learned by anybody of sound mind regardless of age."



Sample Lesson Enables YOU to
Test SPEEDWRITING Shorthand at home—
ABSOLUTELY FREE!

Because SPEEDWRITING shorthand uses the ABC's you have known since your childhood—it is by far the simplest and quickest shorthand to learn. That is why we invite you to mail the coupon NOW for both our FREE booklet and a FREE sample lesson. See for yourself how, within a few moments after you read this sample lesson, you can actually write SPEEDWRITING shorthand. You will be amazed—and delighted. Here is a shorthand that can actually be learned in only 6 weeks at home or through classroom instruction. 120 words per minute—50% FASTER than Civil Service requirements. SPEEDWRITING shorthand is as accurate and speedy as it is simple and easy to learn. Most important of all, you can use it immediately.

FREE! "A Shortcut to a Better
Job and More Pay"

Today there are over 350,000 ambitious men and women who have found SPEEDWRITING shorthand a shortcut to a better job and more pay in business, industry or Civil Service positions. You learn at home in your leisure time or through classroom instruction. The cost is low, terms arranged to suit your convenience.

DID YOU SEE
READER'S DIGEST
ARTICLE ON

Speedwriting®

Dept. 7409-6, 55 West 42nd St., New York 36, N.Y.

School of SPEEDWRITING

Dept. 7409-6, 55 West 42nd St.
New York 36, N. Y.

33rd Year

Please send full details and FREE sample lesson.

☐ Home study ☐ Classroom instruction

Name

Address

City Zone State

ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

Grant stepped forward. The others stepped back. Sloan frowned. "We can do it, fellow." He scribbled. After Grant read it, he laughed and followed Sloan out the back door.

They ran down the alley, then ducked into the livery stable. They worked quickly, hearing the volley of shots down the street. Finally, Sloan said, "Let's go." He noiselessly opened the double doors of the stable. He whistled shrilly and horses scattered into the street toward the Jones gang. He picked up a bucket, filling it with straw, and dropped a match into it.

Then he and Grant climbed into the stagecoach and, guiding from inside with extra-long reins, they started down the alley, circling around to surprise the mounted men from the rear.

Grant whooped in glee. "We sure surprised them coming on them unprotected like this." He shot at them as they bore down on the startled men. "I reckon this fire sure does booger them."

The men, forgetting the posse in the hoosgow, quickly dismounted and ran inside.

"We sure fooled them," Grant repeated gleefully. Then he asked, "How're we going to put out the fire?"

Sloan slowed the horses to a walk, then stopped them. He motioned to Grant to fill his hat with sand. In a few moments, the sand smothered the blaze in the bucket. Sloan whipped the charred part of the stage with his hat until it was completely out.

THEY WALKED back to the jail, where the Jones gang was neatly huddled against one wall with their arms raised. Sloan walked toward them. "You sure are lucky we don't figure on stringing you up, but we're going to be real nice. We're going to give you a trip and let the law judge you. Way I hear tell, they got fancier ways of putting you in the bone-patch than hanging."

The sun was about ready to pop out
[Turn To Page 98]



PLAY GUITAR IN 7 DAYS OR GET MONEY BACK

**SURPRISE FRIENDS, RELATIVES, HAVE
POPULARITY AND FUN GALORE!**

**SEND
NO
MONEY**

In this introductory offer you get TOP RADIO GUITARIST ED SALE'S famous 66 page secret system (worth \$2.75) which positively teaches you to play a beautiful song the first day - and any song by ear or note in 7 days!

Ed Sale has shown thousands of people throughout the country how to play the Guitar like professionals. He now makes it possible for you to learn at home—quickly and easily—even though you have absolutely no previous music knowledge whatever!

This famous system contains 52 photos, 87 finger placing charts, etc. Shows how to tune, keep time,

build chords, bass runs, dance chords, swing, etc., plus 110 popular and western songs, words and music; a \$1.00 Chord Finder of all the chords used in popular music; a \$2.00 Guitarist Book of Knowledge - TOTAL VALUE - \$5.75

ALL THREE for only

2.98

SEND NO MONEY: Just name and address, pay postman \$2.98 plus C.O.D. postage. (Or send \$3.00 with order and I pay postage - same guarantee). Rush Free Trial Coupon below!

INTRODUCTORY OFFER

"ED SALE" WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO PLAY THIS METAL

HARMONICA

IN 15 MINUTES - OR MONEY BACK

IF YOU
CAN WHISTLE
OR
HUM A TUNE

ONLY
2.98

In this INTRODUCTORY OFFER you get this nationally advertised metal harmonica, plus Ed Sale's new discovery for quickly showing you how to play, plus the words and music to 200 songs! All for only \$2.98!

TRY 7 DAYS AT OUR RISK

Learn to play the first day or it costs you nothing! Harmonica is Key of C professional type with individually tuned metal reeds. If you're not playing songs at once, you get your money back!

SEND NO MONEY

MAIL COUPON TODAY

Just send your name and address, and when your HARMONICA and BOOK OF INSTRUCTION and the 200 SONGS arrive, pay postman \$2.98 plus C.O.D. postage. Keep for 7 days. If you are not 100% satisfied, simply return and your money will be refunded at once. Take advantage of this big Introductory offer today.



With True Tone Metal Reeds
SENT ON SEVEN DAY APPROVAL

ED SALE

STUDIO 3015-B

BRADLEY BEACH, N. J.

- ☐ Send ED SALE'S 66-PAGE SECRET SYSTEM—CHORD FINDER OF ALL CHORDS USED IN POP MUSIC—GUITARIST'S BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE. I will pay postman \$2.98, plus C.O.D. postage.
- ☐ Send my GENUINE Key of C PROFESSIONAL METAL HARMONICA and COMPLETE BOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS with the music and words of 200 songs. I will pay postman \$2.98 plus C.O.D. postage.

I must be thrilled or I may return purchase for my money back.

☐ CHECK HERE if you are sending money with order to save C.O.D. and postage.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY AND ZONE STATE

(Sorry, no C.O.D. to APO, FPO or outside U.S.A.
Canada and Foreign remit with order.)

**RUSH
FREE
TRIAL
COUPON
NOW**

on a new day and Sloan wondered where Tod was now. He turned to Old Grant. "Don't be worrying about Tod. He escaped with me, but I don't rightly know where he's at now. Maybe..."

Grant shook his head, his hand over his ear.

"I say," Sloan yelled, "about Tod..."

Grant sighed. "He sure was some problem—boogered all the time. Good riddance. Excepting I sure feel sorry for Mary out there all alone except for her pa. Tod wasn't one who sat tall in the saddle."

Sloan took a deep breath.

"Maybe you better ride out to Mary's," the sheriff said, "and tell her she ain't got nothing to worry about with Tod dead and the Jones captured."

"But Tod isn't dead!" Sloan yelled. "He rode out with me. I sent him ahead to tell you to round up help while I held off the Jones's."

The sheriff shook his head. "He ain't living. Thing is, he come here, all right. He was telling me you was a curly wolf, and then—he seen you coming, so he taken off. Said he was going back to the Jones's and tell them."

"Then, how...?"

Grant rubbed his eyes. "He started running toward his horse. He stumbled and well, his gun went off, and..."

Sloan was silent. "That sure is funny. He didn't have a gun. I got the guard's. That's why I sent him ahead, so I could cover him."

"Yeah. He had one. When he told me about you and all the snakey things you was doing, I give him one. After he had his accident, I pulled him to the side of the hoosgow and come in the back way to meet you."

Sloan put on his hat and walked outside. He would have to go to Mary and tell her the good news and the sad. He stared across the horizon. And then he saw a horse coming toward town. He hooked his thumbs in his belt, standing

motionless. Suddenly, his heart beat faster. Mary rode toward him. "Are you all right?"

"Sure," Sloan smiled.

"I was afraid. I had a feeling..." she hesitated and blushed.

Sloan took off his hat. "I was heading out your way now. To tell you that your spread is safe now. We got the Jones gang. And, about Tod, he escaped with me, but..."

Mary's hand flew to her throat. "He's dead? He didn't get clear?"

Sloan hesitated only a second. "That's right, Mary. He wasn't lucky like me."

Her eyes lighted. "I always knew Tod was good and brave. I'm glad he died doing what was right."

Sloan looked at the men standing on the boardwalk. They shuffled their feet, not meeting his eyes. Then Sloan said, "Like Mary says, Tod sure died a hero."

The men nodded.

Mary took a deep breath. "Pa and I'll be needing a foreman now. Would you be willing to take it? We can't pay much, but we'd sure appreciate it."

Sloan nodded. He was thinking maybe, one of these days, he and Mary might team up as one.

The sheriff called, "Mary, if'n I was you, I'd hire on Sloan for a foreman. Me, I'd make it more permanent. Sloan, there, is straight as a wagon's tongue, and you so pretty and..."

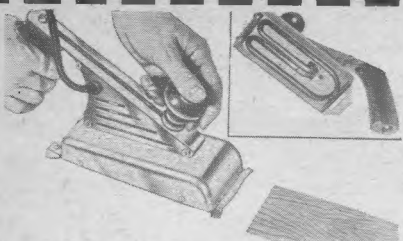
Mary smiled at Sloan, then dropped her eyes. Sloan lifted her into the saddle, then swung behind. "Looks like I'm always needing a mount."

Mary leaned back a bit and Sloan swore to himself that he'd never want a separate mount as long as he was with Mary. Last he heard was Old Grant calling, "We'll be dropping by when it's marrying time."

Mary smiled and Sloan felt as if he was the richest man in all the world.

Meridian's

NEWEST!

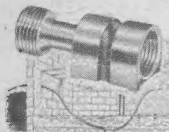


New Electric Paint Peeler

Gets to bare wood fast

New, faster SUPER-POWERMET peels old paint, enamel, varnish, shellac clean to base wood grain like cutting butter with a hot knife. Super-hot tube softens paint electrically. Removes up to 12 layers fast as $3\frac{1}{2}$ square feet per minute. A heavy-duty professional-type tool. Ends scraping, cutting, burning, sanding, chemicals. Just plug into any 110-120 volts AC or 600 Watts DC outlet and allow to heat to 1200 degrees in less than two minutes. Then put it to work on interior or exterior regular or irregular surfaces, like woodwork, clapboards, floors, cupboards, doors, furniture, boats and see it peel off paint like magic. Can be used for removing wall paper, paint from plastered walls, asphalt tile from floors. Heating surface measures 3x7 inches. Complete with 8 foot U.L. approved heater cord. ONLY \$11.98 postpaid. If C.O.D., send \$2.00 deposit, balance plus postage charges.

PUMPS OUT 300 GALLONS PER HOUR



DRAINS CELLARS, SWIMMING POOLS, FISH PONDS, BOATS, EXCAVATIONS, WELL - HOUSES, FLOOD AREAS. Lifts water 6 feet.

New DRAINMASTER solves your flood and drain problems. Ends back-breaking bailing and

hand-pumping jobs. Pumps out all water, right down to floor. OPERATES WITHOUT ELECTRICITY. Just connect DRAINMASTER between two lengths of garden hose; attach one end to handy faucet; run other end out of window or to drain-off area. Turn on faucet and watch DRAINMASTER go to work, pumping out 300 gallons per hour. Made of lifetime brass; no moving parts to wear or jam. Be ready for flood emergency—order now. Remit only \$2.98 with order and we pay postage. If C.O.D. you pay postage.

OPENS CLOGGED SINK WITH ONE STROKE

Now you can do away with chemicals that eat away pipes, cause expensive plumbing bills, ruined clothing, spattered walls, floors. Completely safe in operation.

DRAIN-BLO builds up to 60 lbs. pressure. Just one swift downward stroke opens up sink instantly.

DRAIN-BLO is light and easy to use. Overall length 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Fits all sinks except those equipped for garbage disposal. Order DRAIN-BLO now and have when needed.



**ONLY
\$3.98
postpaid**

GUARANTEE

Every product is guaranteed to be exactly as represented. You must be 100% satisfied with your purchase, or we will cheerfully refund the purchase price. We realize that our success rests upon the complete satisfaction of our customers. Under our guarantee, the customer is always right. Buy with confidence. Our money back guarantee protects you.

MIGHTY GILHOLLIE OPENS AND RESEALS ANY BOTTLE OR JAR

Strong-arm Helper for Kitchen or Bar



Even the daintiest feminine hand has giant's grip when MIGHTY GILHOLLIE is used to open bottles and jars. MIGHTY GILHOLLIE takes fight out of most stubborn screw-top, from nail polish to big jars. Lifts soda caps and pry-off lids with greatest of ease. Does job so neatly and without distortion, perfect reseal job can be done. Not a gadget, but a handsome precision tool. Made of stainless steel. Saves foods, beverages, money. Get one for yourself—others for friends. ONLY \$2.95 postpaid. If C. O. D. plus charges.

SEWS LEATHER AND TOUGH TEXTILES LIKE A MACHINE

With SPEEDY STITCHER Automatic Sewing Awl, anyone can quickly and skillfully sew or repair anything made of LEATHER, CANVAS, NYLON, PLASTIC, or other heavy materials. Sews firm, even lock-stitches like a machine. Gets into hard-to-reach places. Specially made for heavy duty sewing on LUGGAGE, FOOTWEAR, RUGS, AWNINGS, SAILS, SADDLERY, UPHOLSTERY, OVERALLS, AUTO-TOPS, SPORTS GEAR, and other tough sewing jobs. Here's the handiest tool you'll ever own. Will save you many times its small cost. Comes ready for instant use...complete with bobbin of waxed-thread and 3 different types of diamond-pointed needles. Easy-to-follow directions will make you an expert in minute. Extra needles and waxed-thread always available. Save money, send \$1.98 for postpaid delivery. If C.O.D., \$1.98 plus postage.



WORLD'S LOWEST PRICED ADDING MACHINE ONLY \$2.95 postpaid

GUARANTEED ACCURATE ADDS UP TO ONE BILLION
Stop making mistakes! Become a "whiz" at figures. The BABY CALCULATOR is not a toy, but an accurate calculator that works as easily and reliably as expensive machines. With flick of finger, you can ADD, SUBTRACT, MULTIPLY, DIVIDE. ADDS UP TO ONE BILLION. Precision made. Compact as a watch. Fits pocket or purse. Thousands in use by Students, Shopkeepers, Housewives, Small Business Men, and others who can't afford costly mistakes. Saves many times small cost in preventing losses. Handsome carrying case at no extra cost. 10 DAYS FREE TRIAL. Money back guarantee. We pay postage. If you send \$2.95 with order. If C.O.D., postage added.



EASIEST WAY TO SCRAPE PAINT OFF GLASS



New KWIP-SCRAPE takes the "pain" out of painting window frames. Now, you can paint them as fast and easily as flatwork. No more need to use small brush and special care. Use large brush and purposely let paint run over on glass to do better weather-sealing job on frames. When paints sets, simply zip off runovers, smears, spatters and have a straight-lined, weather-sealed job. Ends fumbling with putty-knife or blades. Send only \$1 for postpaid delivery.

MERIDIAN PRODUCTS CO. 366 Madison Ave. Dept. 272 New York 17, N. Y.

Tools

Wholesale

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED TOOLS

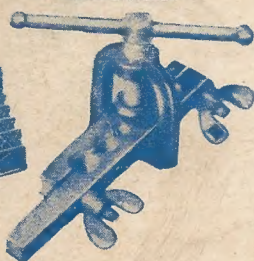
at a Wholesale
DISCOUNT up to

50% OFF

You can buy as you need it. A million dollar inventory at your fingertips.

Stanley, Millers Falls, Plumb, Disston, Wiss,

Black & Decker, Clenson, Thor, Ridgid, K & E, Lufkin and hundreds of other nationally advertised name brand tools, appliances, motors, electric tools, power tools and others too numerous to mention.



EARN BIG *Spot Cash* PROFITS
IN A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN... FULL OR PART TIME

MAKE \$20 A DAY



START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Sell tools to your friends, neighbors, for industrial and institutional use. Everyone needs tools. Meet the demands of the tremendous Do-It-Yourself Market. Build your own business selling nationally advertised tools from an illustrated coded catalog bearing your name and only your name on it. You get all the orders and records. You sell merchandise that is pre-sold for you through national advertising by the country's leading tool manufacturers, such as Black & Decker, Clenson, Disston, K & E, Lufkin, Millers Falls, Ridgid, Stanley, Thor, Wiss and many others! You need not carry any stock—use our capital! All orders

You can buy Nationally
Advertised Hand Tools,
Power Tools, Appliances
and Hardware at a
DISCOUNT up to

50% OFF

Order as you need it.
No Investment Required.

received are shipped the same day from our warehouse stock of over 15,000 items. All merchandise sold on unconditional money-back guarantee. Don't Wait. Act today! Send \$1.00 Deposit for Dealer's card and get our giant new 1956 wholesale catalog at no extra charge. Your \$1.00 is credited to your first purchase or refunded if you are not 100% satisfied. MAIL COUPON NOW! Tool Discount House, Dept. 115, 318 Market St. Newark, New Jersey.

ENCLOSE \$1.00 FOR DEALER'S CARD & MAMMOTH TOOL CATALOG

ACT NOW! MAIL COUPON TODAY!

1956 WHOLESALE CATALOG

- Hand Tools
 - Power Tools
 - Hardware
 - Appliances
- 100% MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

This Coupon Gets You Started!

TOOL DISCOUNT HOUSE DEPT. 115
318 Market St. Newark N J

I am enclosing \$1.00. Rush me your dealer's card and big Catalog Today. If I am not completely satisfied with your plan, I understand that I can return the Dealer's Card and Catalog for refund, and if I decide to order, my \$1.00 will be deductible from my first order.

Name

Address

City Zone State